

A RIGHTED WRONG.



A RIGHTED WRONG.

A Novel.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

'BLACK SHEEP,' 'THE FORLORN HOPE,' 'BROKEN TO HARNESS,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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A RIGHTED WRONG.



CHAPTER I.

DAY.

IT will probably be entirely unnecessary to inform the intelligent reader what was the nature of the contents of the letter which James Dugdale had handed to Mrs. Hungerford. Retrospect, present knowledge, or anticipation will convey a sufficiently accurate perception of it to all the readers of this story.

The writing of that letter was the result of a long and entirely unreserved conversation which had taken place between

Lady Davystry and her brother, after the last-recorded interview between the former and Margaret.

So entirely confident was Eleanor of Mr. Baldwin's feelings and intentions, that she no longer hesitated to speak to him on the matter nearest her heart from any apprehension of defeating her own purpose by precipitation.

In the doubts and fears, in the passionate and painful burst of reminiscence which had given her added insight into Margaret's nature, Lady Davytry had seen, far more plainly than Margaret,—or at least than ever she had confessed to herself,—that a new love, a fresh hope, had come to her. The very strife of feeling which she confessed and described betrayed her to the older woman, whose wisdom, though rather of the heart than of the understanding, was true in this case.

‘It will never do to let her brood over this sort of thing,’ said Lady Davystry to herself with decision. ‘The more time she has to think over it, the more danger there is of her working herself up into a morbid state of mind, persuading herself that she ought to sacrifice her own happiness, and make Fitz wretched, because she had the misfortune to be married to a villain, and associated, through him, with some very bad people—the more she will tax her memory and torture her feelings, by trying to recall and realise all the past. I can see that nature and her youth are helping her to forget it all, and would do so, no doubt, if Fitz never existed; but she is trying to resist the influence of nature, and to train herself to a state of mind which is simply ruinous and absurd.’

So Lady Davystry spoke to her brother that evening, and had the satisfaction of

finding that she had acted wisely in so doing. ‘Don’t speak to her, Fitz,’ she said, towards the conclusion of their conversation; ‘don’t give her the chance of being impelled by such feelings as she has acknowledged to me, to say no,—let her have time to think about it.’

It was a position in which few men would have failed to look silly, that of talking over a love affair, in the ante-proposal stage, with a sister. But Mr. Baldwin was one of those men who never can be made to look silly, who have about them an inborn dignity and entire singleness of purpose which are effectual preservatives against the faintest touch of the ridiculous in their words or actions.

He had spoken frankly of his hopes, and of his grounds for entertaining them, but the account his sister gave of Margaret’s state of mind troubled him sorely.

Here Lady Davystry again proved her possession of sounder sense than many who knew her only slightly would have believed she possessed.

‘It won’t last,’ she assured her brother; ‘it is a false, phantasmal state of feeling, and though it might grow more and more strong if nothing were opposed to it, it will disappear before a true and powerful feeling—rely upon it she will wonder at herself some day, and be hardly able to realise that she ever gave way to this sort of thing.’

Mr. Baldwin wrote the letter, the answer to which was to mean so much to him; and Lady Davystry enclosed it in a cover directed by herself.

‘I don’t think my darling Margaret can have much doubt about how I should regard this affair,’ she said, as she sealed the envelope with such a lavish use of sealing

wax in the enthusiasm of the moment, that it swelled up all round the seal like lilliputian piecrust ; ‘but whatever she may have teased herself with fancying, she will know it is all right when she sees that I enclose your letter. Some women might take it into their heads to be annoyed because you had spoken to another person of your feelings ; but Margaret is too high-minded for anything of that sort, and, rely upon it, she will be none the less happy, if she promises to become your wife, that she will make me as happy in proportion as yourself by the promise.’

At this stage, the impulsive Eleanor gave vent to her emotion by hugging her brother heartily, and accompanying the embrace with a shower of tears.

Margaret remained where James Dugdale had left her standing with Mr. Baldwin’s letter in her hand. She did not

break the seal, she did not move, for several minutes,—then she picked up Lady Daventry's envelope, which had fluttered to the ground, and went into the house.

Any one not so innocently absent-minded as Mr. Carteret, or so cheerfully full of harmless self-content of youth, health, and unaccustomed leisure as Haldane Carteret, could hardly have failed to notice that there was something strange in the looks and manner of two of the little party who sat down that day to the dinner-table at Chayleigh, shorn of much of its formality since Mrs. Carteret had ceased to preside over it.

Margaret was paler than usual, but not with the pallor of ill-health—the clear skin had no sallowness in its tint.

To one accustomed to read the countenance which had acquired of late so much new expression, and such a softening of the

old one, the indication of strong emotion would have been plain, in the pale cheek, the lustrous, downcast eye, the occasional trembling of the small lips, the absent, preoccupied gaze, the sudden recall of her attention to the present scene, the forced smile when her father spoke to her, and the unusual absence of interest and pleasure in Haldane's jokes, which were sometimes good, but always numerous.

James Dugdale sat at the table, quite silent, and did not even make any attempt to eat. Margaret, with the superior powers of hypocrisy observable in the female, affected, unnecessarily, to have a very good appetite. The meal was a painful probation for them.

It was so far from unusual for James to be ill and depressed, that when Haldane had commented upon his silence and his want of appetite in his usual off-hand

fashion, and Mr. Carteret had lamented those misfortunes, and digressed into speculation whether James had not better have his dinner just before going to bed, because wild beasts gorge themselves with food, and go to sleep immediately afterwards,—no further notice was taken.

It never occurred to Mr. Carteret or to Haldane that anything except illness could ail James. Neither did it occur to one or the other to notice that Margaret, usually so observant of James, so kind in her attention to him, so sympathetic, who understood his ‘good days’ and his ‘bad days’ so well, did not make the slightest remark herself, and suffered theirs to pass without comment.

She never once addressed James during dinner, nor did her glance encounter his. Why?

It had been Margaret’s custom of late

to sit with her father in his study during the evening. Mr. Carteret and she would adjourn thither immediately after dinner, and James and Haldane usually joined them after a while.

Margaret did not depart from her usual practice on this particular evening, but she was not inclined to talk to her father. She settled him into his particular chair, in his inevitable corner, and began to read aloud to him, with more than her usual promptness.

But somehow the reading was not successful, her voice was husky and uncertain, and her inattention so obvious that it soon became infectious, and Mr. Carteret found the effort of listening beyond him. An unusually prolonged and unmistakable yawn, for which he hastened to apologise, made the fact evident to Margaret.

‘I think we are both disinclined for

reading to-night, papa,' she said as she laid aside her book, and took a low seat by her father's side. 'We will talk now for a while.'

'Very well, my dear,' said the acquiescent Mr. Carteret. But Margaret did not seem inclined to follow up her own proposition actively. She sat still, dreamily silent, and her fingers played idly with the fringe which bordered the chintz cover of her father's chair. At length she said:

'Papa, what do you think of Mr. Baldwin?'

'What do I think of Mr. Baldwin, my dear?' repeated Mr. Carteret slowly. 'I think very highly of him indeed: a most accomplished young man I consider him, and excessively obliging, I'm sure. I don't flatter myself, you know, Margaret, with any notion that I am a particularly delightful companion for any one; indeed, since

our great loss, I am best alone I think, or with you—with you, my dear,' and her father patted Margaret's head just as he had been used to pat it when she was a little child; 'and still, he seems to like being with me, and takes the greatest interest in my collection. Excessively liberal he is, too, and I can assure you very few collectors, however rich they may be, are *that*. He has shared his magnificent specimens of lepidoptera with me, and I have not another friend in the world who would do that. Think of him?' said Mr. Carteret again, returning to Margaret's question. 'I think most highly of him. But why do you ask me? Don't you think well of him yourself?'

Margaret looked up hastily, dropped her eyes again, and said:

'O yes, papa; I—I do, indeed; but I wanted to ask you, because——' A quick

tapping at the window interrupted her. Haldane stood outside, and his sister left her seat and went to him.

‘Come out for a walk, Madge,’ he said. ‘James is queer this evening, and says he will just give the governor half-an-hour, and then go to bed. You don’t want them both, do you, sir?’ Haldane asked the question with his head inside, and his body outside the window. ‘I thought not. Here’s James now.’ At that moment Mr. Dugdale entered the room. ‘Come on; you can get your bonnet and shawl; the door is open.’

Margaret had not turned her face from the window, and she now stepped out into the verandah. She had not seen the expression on James Dugdale’s face. Instinct caused her to avoid him. She had not yet faced the subject in her own mind, she had not yet reckoned with herself about it.

‘Has she written to him? Is he coming here? How is it?’

These were the questions which repeated themselves in James’s brain, as he tried to talk to Mr. Carteret, and tried *not* to follow the footsteps of the woman whose way was daily deviating more and more widely from his.

The brother and sister walked down the terrace, and into the pleasaunce together.

Haldane had been exposed to the fascinations of the eldest Miss Crofton for the last ten days or so, and, being rather defenceless under such circumstances, though not, as he said of himself, ‘a lady’s man,’ he was very likely to capitulate, unless some providential occurrence furnished him with a change of occupation, and thus diverted his mind.

At present the eldest Miss Crofton—her papa, her mamma, her little brother, a won-

derfully clever child, and particularly fond of being ‘taken round the lawn’ on Haldane’s horse, with only Haldane on one side and his sister on the other to hold him on —her housekeeping science, and her equestrian feats, afforded Haldane topics of conversation of which Margaret showed no weariness. Her attention certainly did wander a little, but Haldane did not perceive it.

They had passed through the gate into the fields which bordered on Davyntry, and Haldane had just pleaded for a little more time out, the evening was so beautiful—adding his conviction that every woman in the world was greedy about her tea, and that Margaret would not be half so pale if she drank less of that pernicious decoction —when she started so violently that he could not fail to perceive it.

‘What’s the matter?’ he asked, in surprise.

‘Nothing,’ said Margaret. ‘There’s—there’s some one coming.’

‘So there is,’ said Haldane, looking at a figure advancing quickly towards them from the direction of Davystry; ‘and it is Baldwin.’

The blood rushed violently into Margaret’s cheeks, her feet were rooted to the ground for a moment, as she felt the whole scene around her grow indistinct; the next, she was meeting Mr. Baldwin with composure which far surpassed his own, and in the first glance of her candid eyes, which looked up at him shyly, but entirely with their owner’s will, he read the answer to his letter.

‘If you will take Margaret home to this important and ever-recurring tea, Baldwin,’

said Haldane Carteret, ‘I will go on a little farther, and smoke my cigar.’

He went away from them quickly, and saying to himself, ‘It is to be, I think.’

CHAPTER II.

FULL COMPENSATION.

It did not fall to Margaret Hungerford's lot to resume the topic of her interrupted conversation with her father. Mr. Baldwin took that upon himself, and so sped in his mission, that the old gentleman declared himself happier than he had ever been in his life before; and then, suddenly and remorsefully reminiscent of his late domestic affliction, he added, ‘If only poor Sibylla were here with us to share all this good fortune!’ An aspiration which Mr. Baldwin could have found it in his heart to echo, so full was that heart of joy.

In the love of this man for Margaret

there was so much of generous kindness, such an intense desire to fill her life with a full and compensating happiness, to efface the past utterly, and give her in the present all that the heart of the most exacting woman could covet, that he regarded his success with more than the natural and customary exultation of a lover to whom 'yes' has been said or rather implied. That Margaret realised, or indeed understood, even in its broad outlines, the alteration in the external circumstances of her life which her becoming his wife would effect, he did not imagine; and he exulted to an extent which he would hitherto have believed impossible in the knowledge that he could give her wealth and position only inferior to his love.

Beyond a vague understanding that Mr. Baldwin was a very rich man for a commoner, and that, as the property was en-

tailed on heirs general, Lady Davystry would have it in the event of his dying childless, Mr. Carteret had no clear notions about the position in which his daughter's second marriage would place her, and Mr. Baldwin's explanations rather puzzled and confounded the worthy gentleman. He had shrunk as much as possible from realising to himself the circumstances of Margaret's life in Australia, the disastrous experiences of her first marriage, and he now showed his dread of them chiefly by the complacency, the delight with which he dwelt upon the happiness which he anticipated for her in the society of Mr. Baldwin, so accomplished a man, so perfect a gentleman, and withal such a lover of natural history. He was not disposed to take other matters deeply into consideration, and it was chiefly Haldane with whom the preliminaries of the marriage, which was to

take place soon, and with as little stir or parade as possible, were discussed. The young man's exultation was extreme. He expressed his feelings pretty freely, after his usual fashion, to everybody ; but he reserved the full flow of his delight for James Dugdale's special edification.

' It isn't the correct thing to talk to Baldwin about, of course,' he said one day ; ' but I find it very hard to hold my tongue, when I think of that ruffian Hungerford, and that it was through me she first saw him, and got the chance of bringing misery on herself. I long to tell Baldwin all about him. But it wouldn't do. I wonder if he knows much concerning him.'

' Nothing, I should say,' returned James shortly,—he never could be induced to say much when the topic of Margaret and her lover was in any way under discussion,—but the unsuspecting Haldane, in whose

eyes James Dugdale, though a more interesting companion, was a contemporary of his father, and in the ‘fogey’ category, did not notice this reluctance.

‘Well, I suppose not,’ said Haldane musingly. ‘It’s a pity; for he would understand what we all think about *him*, if he did; and I don’t see how he is to realise that otherwise.’

‘Margaret will teach him how he is estimated,’ said James sadly.

‘I hope so,’ was Haldane’s hearty and emphatic reply. ‘By Jove! it’s a wonderful thing, when you come to think of it, that anybody should have things made up to them so completely as Madge is going to have them made up. I don’t mean only his money, you know. I wonder how she will get on in Scotland, how she will play her part among the people there. I dare-say Baldwin’s neighbours will not like her

much; I suppose the mothers in that part of the world looked upon him as their natural prey.'

'I don't know about that,' said James, 'but I fancy Margaret will be quite able to hold her own wherever she may go; she is the sort of woman who may be safely trusted with wealth and station.'

This was by no means the only conversation which took place between the ex-tutor and the ex-pupil on the subject then engrossing the attention of the families at Davytry and Chayleigh; Haldane's exuberant delight was apt to communicate itself after a similar fashion very frequently, and altogether he subjected his friend just then to a not inconsiderable amount of pain.

During the few weeks which intervened before the period named, very shortly after their engagement, for the marriage of Mar-

garet Hungerford and Fitzwilliam Baldwin, there was no approach on Margaret's part to any confidential intercourse with James Dugdale. By tacit mutual consent they avoided each other, and yet she never so wronged in her thoughts the man who loved her with so disinterested a love, as to believe him alienated from her, jealous of the good fortune of another, or grudging to her of the happiness which was to be hers.

In the experience of her own feelings, in the engrossment of her own heart and thoughts in the new and roseate prospects which had opened suddenly before her, after her long wandering in dreary ways, she had learned to comprehend James Dugdale. She knew now how patiently and constantly he had loved and still loved her; she knew now what had given him a prescient knowledge of her former self-

sought doom; she knew what had inspired the efforts he had made to avert it from her. Inexpressible kindness and pity for him, painful gratitude towards this man whom she never could have loved, filled Margaret's heart; but she kept aloof from him. Explanation between them there could not be—it would be equally bad for both. He who had so striven to avert her misery would be consoled by her perfect happiness; in the time to come, the blessed peaceful time, he should share it.

So she and James lived in the usual close relation, and Mr. Carteret and Haldane talked freely of the coming event, of the splendid prospects opening before Margaret; but never a word was spoken directly between the two.

A strongly appreciative friendship had sprung up between Mr. Baldwin and James Dugdale. The elder man regarded the

younger without one feeling of envy of the good looks, the good health, the physical activity,—in all which he was himself deficient,—but with a thorough comprehension of the difference between them which they constituted, and an almost womanish admiration of one so richly dowered by nature.

Since Mr. Baldwin's engagement to Margaret,—though James had loyally forced himself to utter the congratulations of whose truth and meaning none could form a truer estimate than he,—there had been little intercourse between them. Mr. Baldwin now claimed Margaret as his chief companion during his daily and lengthy visits to Chayleigh; and she, with all a woman's tact and instinctive delicacy, quietly aided the unobserved severance between himself and James, of which her lover was wholly unconscious.

So the time—a time of such exceeding and incredible happiness to Margaret, that not all her previous experience of the delusions of life could avail to check the avidity with which she enjoyed every hour of it, and listened with greedy ears to every promise and protestation for the future—went on.

On one point only she found she was not to have her own wishes carried out, wishes shared to the utmost by Mr. Baldwin. Her father did not take kindly to the idea of leaving Chayleigh. His reasons were amusingly characteristic.

‘ You see, my dear,’ he said, when the matter had been urged upon him, with every kind of plea and prayer by Margaret, and with respectful earnestness by Mr. Baldwin, ‘ I should never feel quite myself, I should never feel quite comfortable away from my collection. You, my

dear Margaret, never had any great taste in that way, and of course you don't understand it; but there's Baldwin, now. You wouldn't like to part with your collection, would you? You have a great many other reasons for liking the Deane, of course, besides that; but considering only that, you would not like it?

‘Good heavens, sir!’ exclaimed Mr. Baldwin, ‘how could you imagine such a thing as that we ever dreamed of parting you and your collection? Why, we should as soon have thought of asking you to leave your arms or legs after you. Of course you'll move your collection to the Deane; there's room for a dozen of the size.’

Mr. Carteret was a little put out, not exactly annoyed, but *gêné*; and Margaret, who understood him perfectly, stopped her lover's flow of protestation and proposal

by a look, and they soon left him to himself; whereupon Mr. Carteret immediately summoned James, and imparted to him the nature of the conversation which had just taken place.

‘Baldwin is the very best fellow in the world, James,’ said the old gentleman in a confidential tone; ‘but, between you and me, we collectors and lovers of natural history are rather odd in our ways; we have our little peculiarities, and our little jealousies, and our little envies. You know I would not deny Baldwin’s good qualities; and he has been very generous too in giving me specimens; but I have a kind of notion, for all that, that he would have no objection to my collection finding its way to the Deane.’

Here Mr. Carteret looked at James Dugdale, as if he had made a surprisingly deep discovery; and James Dugdale had con-

siderable difficulty in concealing his amusement.

‘Now you can, I am sure, quite understand that, however I may appreciate Baldwin, I have no fancy for seeing my collection, after working at it all these years, merged in another — merged, my dear James!’

And Mr. Carteret’s tone grew positively irate, while he tapped Dugdale’s arm impatiently with his long fingers.

‘But, sir,’ said James, ‘I quite understand all that; but how about parting with Margaret? If she is to be at the Deane, hadn’t you better be there also? She is of more importance to you than even your collection, is she not?’

‘Well, yes, in a certain sense,’ said the old gentleman, rather dubiously and reluctantly; ‘in a certain sense, of course she is; but, then, I can go to the Deane when

I like, and she can come here when she likes; and so long as I know she is happy (and she cannot fail to be *happy* this time), I don't so much mind. But I really could not part with my collection; and if it were moved and merged, I should feel I had parted with it. No, no, Margery and Baldwin will be great companions for each other, and they will do very well without us, James; we will just stay quietly here in the old place, and I am sure Haldane will undertake not to move my collection when I am gone.'

Immediately after this conversation, Mr. Carteret applied himself with great assiduity to the precious pursuit which, in the great interest of the domestic discussions then pending, he had somewhat neglected, and showed his jealous zeal for his beloved specimens by a thousand little indications which Margaret perceived, and

which she interpreted to Mr. Baldwin, very much to his amusement.

'Haldane,' said James Dugdale to Captain Carteret, 'I think you had better give Margaret a hint that she had better not urge her father's leaving Chayleigh; depend upon it, he will never consent, except it be very much against his will; and if she presses him, she will only run the risk of making him like Baldwin very much less than he does at present.'

'You are quite right,' said Haldane, who was busily engaged in mending the eldest Miss Crofton's riding-whip; 'but why don't you tell her so yourself?'

James was rather embarrassed by the question; but he said, 'It would come better from you.'

'Would it? I don't see it. However, I don't mind. I'll speak to her. All right.'

Haldane did speak to Margaret; and she acquiesced in James's opinion, and conformed to his advice. The subject dropped, and Mr. Carteret entirely recovered his spirits. Haldane had another little matter to negotiate with his sister, in which he was not so successful. He knew the wedding was to be very quiet indeed; but everybody either then knew, or soon would know, that such an event was in contemplation; and he could not see that it could make any difference to Margaret just to have the eldest Miss Crofton for her bridesmaid. He could assure his sister the eldest, 'Lucy, you know,' was 'an extremely nice girl,' and her admiration of Margaret quite enthusiastic.

Margaret was quite sure Lucy Crofton was a very nice girl indeed; and she would have her for her bridesmaid, had she any intention of indulging in such an accessory,

but she had none; and Haldane (of course men did not understand such matters) had not reflected that to invite Miss Lucy in such a capacity must imply inviting all her family as spectators, and entail the undying enmity of the ‘neighbourhood’ at their exclusion.

‘O, hang it, Madge,’ said Haldane in impatient disdain of this reasoning, ‘we are not people of such importance that the neighbourhood need kick up a row because we are married or buried without their assistance.’

‘We are not,’ said Margaret gently, ‘but Fitzwilliam is; and don’t you suppose, you dear stupid boy, that there are plenty of people to envy me my good fortune, of which they only know the flimsy surface, and to find me guilty of all sorts of insolences that I never dreamt of, if they only get the chance?’

'I never thought of that. You're quite right, after all, Madge,' said Haldane ruefully.

'There's a good deal you have never thought of, and which my life has made plain to me,' said Margaret; and then she added in a lower tone, 'Can you not understand, Hal, how terribly trying my wedding will be to me, how many painful thoughts it must bring me? Can you not see that I must wish to get through it as quietly as possible?'

This was the first word of reference, however distant, to the past which her brother had heard from Margaret's lips; this was the first time he had ever seen the hard, lowering, stern, self-despising look upon her face, which had been familiar to all the other dwellers at Chayleigh before his return, and before she had accepted her new life and hope.

She looked gloomily out over the prospect as she spoke. She and Haldane were walking together, and were just then opposite to the beeches. She caught Haldane's arm, and turned him sharply round, then walked rapidly away from the spot.

'What's the matter?' said her brother. He felt what she had just said deeply, notwithstanding his *insouciance*. 'What are you walking so fast for? You look as if you saw a ghost!'

'What, in the daylight, Hal?' said Margaret with a forced laugh. 'No, we are rather late; let us go in.'

The pleasure of Lady Davytry in the perfect success of all her most cherished wishes would have been delightful to witness to any observer of a philosophic tendency. It is so rarely that any one is happy and grateful in proportion to one's anxiety

and effort. Such purely disinterested pleasure as was hers is not frequently desired or enjoyed.

‘If anybody had told me I could ever feel so happy again in a world which my Richard has left, I certainly would not have believed them,’ said Eleanor, as Margaret strove to thank her for the welcome she gave her to the proud and happy position soon to be hers; ‘and you would hardly believe me, Madge, if I were to tell you how short a time after the day I tried to make Fitz spy you through the glass there, and he was much too proper and genteel to do anything of the kind, I began to look forward to this happy event.’

To do Lady Davytry justice, it was some time before she admitted minor considerations in support of her vast and intense satisfaction; it was actually twenty-four hours after her brother had informed

her that Margaret had accepted him, when she found herself saying aloud, in the gladness of her heart and the privacy of her own room, ‘How delightful it is to think that now there is no danger of his marrying a Scotchwoman! How savage Jessie MacAlpine will be!’

The dew was shining on the grass and the flowers, the birds had hardly begun their morning hymn, on a morning in the gorgeous month of June, when Margaret Hungerford, wrapped in a white dressing-gown, and leaning out of the passion-flower-framed window of her room, looked out towards the woods of Davystry. The tall, fantastic, twisted chimneys and turrets, rich with the deep red of the old brickwork, showed through the leaf-laden trees. Margaret’s pale, clear, spiritual face was turned towards them, her hands were clasped upon

the window-sill; she leaned more forward still, and her long hair was stirred by the light wind.

‘The one only thing he asks me for his sake,’ she murmured; ‘but O, how difficult, how impossible, never to look back, never voluntarily to look back upon the past again! To live for the present and the future, to live only in his life, as he lives only in mine. Ah, that is easy for him, or at least easier; and it may be so—but for me, for me.’ She swayed her slight figure to and fro, and wrung her hands. It was long since the gesture had ceased to be habitual now. ‘I will try, I will keep my word to you, in all honest intention at least, my darling, my love, my husband!’ She slightly waved one hand towards the woods, and a beautiful flush spread itself over her face. ‘I will turn all my heart for ever from the past, if any

effort of my will can do it, and live in your life only.'

A few hours later, the quietest wedding that had ever been known in that part of the country took place in the parish church of Chayleigh, very much to the dissatisfaction of the few spectators who had had sufficient good fortune to be correctly informed of the early hour appointed for the ceremony.

'Gray silk, my dear, and a chip bonnet, as plain as you please,' said Miss Laughton, the village dressmaker, to Miss Harland, the village milliner. 'I should like to know what poor Mrs. Carteret, that's dead and gone, but had as genteel a taste in dress as ever I knew, would say to such a set-out as that.'

'I expect, Jemima,' replied Miss Harland, who had a strong dash of spite in her composition, and felt herself aggrieved

at the loss of Mrs. Hungerford's modest custom in the article of widow's caps—‘I expect madam would not have caught Mr. Baldwin easy, if Mrs. Carteret was alive; and gray silk and chip is good enough for her. I wonder what she wore at her wedding, when she ran away with Mr. Hungerford—which he was a gay chap, whatever they had to say against him.’

In these days, the avoidance of festive proceedings on the occasion of a marriage is not unusual; but when Margaret was married, that the bride and bridegroom should drive away from the church-door was an almost unheard-of proceeding. Nevertheless, Mr. Baldwin and Margaret departed after that fashion; and Lady Davystry only returned to Chayleigh to console Mr. Carteret, who really did not seem to need consolation.

A few days later, as Margaret and her husband were strolling arm-in-arm in the evening along the sea-shore of a then almost unknown village in South Wales,—now a prosperous and consequently intolerable ‘watering-place,’—Mr. Baldwin said to her—they had been talking of some letters he had had from his steward:

‘I wonder if you have any doubts in your mind about liking the Deane, Margaret. I am longing to see you there, to watch you making acquaintance with the place, taking your throne in your own kingdom.’

‘And I,’ she said with a smile and a wistful look in her gray eyes, ‘sometimes think that when I am there I shall feel like Lady Burleigh.’

CHAPTER III.

THREE LETTERS.

EIGHTEEN months had elapsed since the marriage of Fitzwilliam Baldwin and Margaret Hungerford,—a period which had brought about few changes at Chayleigh, beyond the departure, at an early stage of its duration, of Haldane Carteret to join his regiment, and which had been productive of only one event of importance. The eldest Miss Crofton had terminated at her leisure, after Margaret's departure, the capture of the young captain, as he was called by a courteous anticipation of the natural course of events, and there was every reason to suppose that the ensuing

year would witness a second wedding from Chayleigh, in the parish church, which should be by no means obnoxious to public sentiment, on the score of quiet, if the eldest Miss Crofton should have her own way, which, indeed, the fair Lucy generally contrived to procure in every affair in which she was interested.

Her parents entirely approved of the engagement. She had no fortune, and Haldane's prospective independence was certain. It was a very nice thing for her to be wife to the future Mr. Carteret of Chayleigh, and almost a nicer thing for her to be sister-in-law to Mrs. Meriton Baldwin of the Deane.

Margaret had become a wonderfully important personage in the neighbourhood she had left. Every particular of her household, every item of her expenditure, and—when she stayed a month at her father's

house after her little daughter's birth, prior to going abroad for an indefinite period, now more than six months ago,—every article of her dress, was a subject of discussion and interest to people who had taken no particular notice of her in her previous stages of existence. The eldest Miss Crofton had a little ovation when she returned from a visit to the Deane, and simple Mr. Carteret was surprised to find how many friends he was possessed of, how many inquirers were unwearingly anxious to learn the latest news of ‘dear Mrs. Baldwin.’

The quiet household at Chayleigh pursued its usual routine course, and little change had come to the two men, the one old, the other now elderly, who were its chief members. Of that little, the greater portion had fallen to the share of James Dugdale. His always bent and twisted figure was now more bent and twisted, his

hair was grayer and scantier, his eyes were more hollow, his face was more worn, his quiet manner quieter, his rare smile more seldom seen. Any one familiar with his appearance eighteen months before, who had seen him enter the cheerful breakfast-room at Chayleigh one bright winter's morning, when Christmas-day was but a week off, would have found it difficult to believe that the interval had been so short.

James Dugdale stood by the fire for a few minutes, then glancing round at the breakfast-table, he muttered, ‘The post is not in—behind time—the snow, I suppose,’ and went to the large window, against which he leaned, idly watching the birds as they hopped about on the snow-laden ground, and extracted bits of leaves and dry morsels of twig from its niggard breast. He was still standing there when Mr. Car-

teret came in, closely followed by a servant with a small tray laden with letters, which he duly sorted and placed before their respective claimants.

There was a large foreign letter among those addressed to James Dugdale, but he let it lie beside his plate unnoticed; all his attention was for the letter which Mr. Carteret was deciphering with laborious difficulty.

‘From Margaret,’ said the old gentleman at length, taking off his double glasses with an air of relief, and laying them on the table. ‘She *does* write such a scratchy hand, it quite makes my head ache to read it.’

‘Where are they now?’ asked James.

‘At Sorrento. Margaret writes in great delight about the place and the climate, and the people they meet there, and the beauty and health of little Gerty. And

Baldwin adds a postscript about the *cicale*, which is just what I wanted to know ; he considers there's no doubt about their chirp being much stronger and more prolonged than our grasshopper's, and he has carefully examined the articulations.'

' Does Margaret say anything about her own health ?' interrupted James, so impatiently that he felt ashamed of himself the next minute, although Mr. Carteret took the sudden suppression of his favourite topic with perfect meekness, as he made answer :

' Yes, a good deal. Here it is, read the letter for yourself, James,'—and he handed over the document to his companion, and betook himself to the perusal of a scientific review,—a production rarer in those days than now,—and for whose appearance Mr. Carteret was apt to look with eagerness.

James Dugdale read the letter which Margaret Baldwin had written to her father from end to end, and then he turned back to the beginning, and read it through again. No document which could come from any human hand could have such a charm and value for him as one of her letters.

His feelings had undergone no change as regarded her, though, as regarded himself, they had become purified from the little dross of selfishness and vain regret that had hung about them for a little after she had left Chayleigh. He could now rejoice, with a pure and true heart, in her exceeding, her perfect happiness ; he could think of her husband, whom she loved with an intense and passionate devotion which had transformed her character, as it seemed at times to transfigure her face, illuminating it with a

heavenly light—with ardent friendship and gratitude as the giver of such happiness, and with sincere and ungrudging admiration as the being who was capable of inspiring such a love. He could thank God now, from his inmost heart, for the change which had been wrought in, and for, the woman he loved with a love which angels might have seen with approval. All he had longed and prayed and striven for, was her good—and it had come—it had been sent in the utmost abundance ; and he never murmured now, ever so lightly, that *he* had not been suffered to count for anything in the fulfilment of his hope, in the answer to his prayer.

He read, with keen delight, the simple but strong words in which Margaret described to her father the peace, happiness, companionship and luxury of her life. Only the lightest cloud had cast a shade

over the brightness of Margaret's life since her marriage. She had been rather delicate in health after the birth of her child, and a warmer climate than that of Scotland had been recommended for her. Mr. Baldwin had not been sorry for the opportunity thus afforded him of indulging Margaret and himself by visiting the countries so well known to him, but which his wife had never seen. Her experience of travel had been one of wretchedness ; in this respect, also, he would make the present contrast with and efface the past. The 'Lady Burleigh' feeling which Margaret had anticipated had come upon her sometimes, in the stately and well-ordered luxury of her new home ; she had sometimes experienced a startling sense of the discrepancy between the things she had seen and suffered, and her surroundings at the Deane ; but these fitful feelings had not recurred

often or remained with her long, and she had become deeply attached to her beautiful home. Nevertheless, she, too, had welcomed the prospect of a foreign tour; and during her visit, *en route*, to Chayleigh, she had spoken so freely and frequently to James of her anticipations of pleasure, of the delight she took in her husband's cultivated taste, and in his manifold learning, that James perceived how rapidly and variously her intellect had developed in the sunshine of happiness and domestic love.

'Though she has always been the first of women in my mind,' James Dugdale had said to himself then, 'I would not have said she was either decidedly clever or decidedly handsome formerly, and now she is both beautiful and brilliant.'

And so she was. It was not the praise of prejudice which pronounced her so. There were many who would, if they

could, have denied such attributes to Mrs. Baldwin of the Deane, but they might as well have attempted to deny light to the sunshine.

In this letter, which James Dugdale read with such pleasure, Margaret said she was stronger, ‘much stronger,’ and that every one thought her looking very well. ‘Fitzwilliam is so much of that opinion,’ she wrote, ‘that he thinks this is a favourable opportunity of having a life-size portrait taken of me, especially as a first-rate artist has just been introduced to us,—if the picture be successful, a replica shall be made for you. The long windows of our sitting-rooms open on a terrace overhanging the sea, and the walls are overrun with passion-flower—just like those at home, which James used to take such care of. I mean to have my picture taken standing in the centre window, with my little Gertrude in

my arms. If you don't like this, or prefer any other pose, say so when you write. Eleanor is delighted with the notion.'

The tone of the whole letter was that of happiness, full, heartfelt, not wanting in anything. James Dugdale held it still in his hands, when he had read it through for the second time, and fell into one of the reveries which were habitual to him. It showed him Margaret, as he had seen her on the day of her unexpected return, pale, stern, defiant of the bitterness of her fate,—her slight form, clad in its heavy mourning robes, framed by the passion-flower tendrils, the woman in whose face he read more than confirmation of all he had ever feared or prophesied of evil for her, and in whose letter there was such a story of happiness as it falls but rarely to the lot of any mortal to have to tell. He had never felt so entirely, purely, un-

selfishly happy about Margaret as he felt at that moment.

‘ You have no letter from Haldane, have you ?’ asked Mr. Carteret, as he relinquished his review for his coffee-cup. ‘ I have not, and Margery complains that he has not written.’

The question reminded James of his hitherto disregarded letters. He turned to the table and took them up :

‘ No, sir, there’s no letter from Haldane.’

Mr. Carteret uttered a feeble sound of dissatisfaction, but made no farther remark, and James opened the foreign letter, which was, as he expected, from Hayes Meredith. It announced the writer’s intended departure from Melbourne by the first ship after that which should carry the present letter, and named the period at which the writer hoped to reach England.

‘The Yarra is a quick sailer,’ wrote Hayes Meredith, ‘and we expect to be in Liverpool a few weeks later than the Emu. My former letters will have explained how all difficulties subsided, but up to the last I have not felt quite confident of being able to get away, and thought it was well to write only one ship in advance.’

There was a good deal of expression of pleasure at the prospect of seeing his old friend again, and introducing his son to him, on Hayes Meredith’s part, some anxiety about his son’s future, and warm thanks to James for certain propositions he had made concerning him.

‘My friend Meredith and his son have sailed at last, sir,’ said James, addressing Mr. Carteret. ‘He will be here soon, I fancy, if they have had fine weather.’

‘Indeed,’ said Mr. Carteret. ‘I hope he is bringing the opossum and wombat

skins, and the treeworm and boomerang you asked him for. I should like to have them really brought from the spot, you know. One can buy such things from the dealers, of course, but they are never so interesting, and often not genuine.'

'I have no doubt, sir, they will all arrive quite safely.'

'You have asked Mr. Meredith and his son to come here direct, I hope, James?'

'Yes, I obeyed your kind instructions in that.'

'What a pity Margery is not here,' said Mr. Carteret, with a placid little sigh, 'to see her kind friend!'

'Never mind, sir; Margaret will have plenty of opportunity for seeing Meredith. He will not remain less than six months in England.'

In the pleasure and the excitement caused by the prospect of his friend's ar-

rival (it was not customary or possible then for people to drop in from Melbourne for a week or two, and be heard of next at Salt Lake), James did not immediately remember what Margaret had said when Hayes Meredith's coming had first been talked of—that if he or any one came from the place which had witnessed her suffering and degradation, to her father's house, she should feel it to be an evil omen to her. When at length he did recall her expression of feeling about it, he smiled.

‘How she would laugh at herself if I were to remind her now that she once said that! What could be an ill omen to her now? What could bring evil near her now?—God bless her!’

Some weeks later the *Yarra*, having encountered boisterous weather in the Channel, arrived at Liverpool. On the day but one following its arrival, James Dugdale

received a short note from Hayes Meredith, which contained these words:

Liverpool, Jan. 24.

' MY DEAR DUGDALE,—We have arrived, and Robert and I hope to get to Chayleigh by Thursday. Should Mrs. Baldwin be in Scotland, endeavour to induce her to see me, at her father's house, in preference to any other place, as soon as possible. Do this, if you can, without alarming her, but at all events, and under all risks, *do it*. Circumstances which occurred immediately before my departure make it indispensable that I should see her *at once* on important and, I regret to add, unpleasant business. I am too tired and dizzy to write more.—Yours,

CHAPTER IV.

HAYES MEREDITH'S REVELATION.

IT had seldom fallen to the lot of James Dugdale to experience more painful mental disquietude than that in which he passed the interval between the receipt of Hayes Meredith's letter and the arrival of his friend, accompanied by his son, at Chayleigh. Mr. Carteret, always unobservant, did not notice the preoccupation of James's manner, and James had decided, within a few minutes after he had read the communication which had so disturbed him, that he would not mention the matter to the old gentleman at all, if concealment were practicable—certainly not before it

should become indispensable, if it should ever prove to be so.

An unpleasant communication to be made to Margaret! What could it be? The vain question whose solution was so near, and yet appeared to him so distant, in his impatience repeated itself perpetually in every waking hour, and he would frequently start from his sleep, roused by a terrible sense of undefined trouble impending over the woman who never ceased to occupy the chief place in his thoughts. The problem took every imaginable shape in his mind. The little knowledge he had of the circumstances of Margaret's life in Australia left him scope for all kinds of conjectures, and did not impose superior probability on any. Was there a secret reason beyond, more pressing than her natural, easily explicable shrinking from the revival of pain and humiliation, which kept Margaret so

absolutely and resolutely silent concerning the years of her suffering and exile? Was there something which she knew and dreaded, which might come to light at any time, which was soon to come to light now, in the background of her memory? Was there some transaction of Hungerford's, involving disgraceful consequences, which had been dragged into publicity, in which she, too, must be involved, as well as the dead man's worthless memory? This might be the case; it might be debts, swindling, anything; and the brilliant and happy marriage she had made, might be destined to be clouded over by the shadow of her former life.

James Dugdale suffered very keenly during the few days in which he pondered upon these things. He tortured himself with apprehension, and knew that, to a certain extent, it must be groundless. The

only real, serious injury which could come out of the dark storehouse of the past, into the present life of Fitzwilliam Baldwin's wife, must be one of a nature to interfere with her relations towards her husband. She could afford to defy every other kind of harm. She was raised far above the influence of all material evil, and removed from the sphere in which the doings of people like Hungerford and his associates were ever heard of. Her marriage buckled her no less against present than past evil; on all sides but one. When James weighed calmly the matter of which he never ceased to think, he called in ‘the succours of thought’ to the discomfiture of ‘fear,’ which in its vague has greater torment than in its most defined shape, and drew upon their resources largely. Margaret had indeed been reticent with him, with her father, with Haldane, even, he felt persuaded, with

her sister-in-law Lady Davyntry; but had she been equally reticent with Baldwin? He thought she had not; he hoped, he believed she had not; that the confidence existing between her and her husband was as perfect as their mutual love, and that, however strictly she might have maintained a silence, which Baldwin would have been the last man in the world to induce or wish her to break, up to the period of her marriage, he did not doubt that Margaret's husband was now in possession of all the facts of her past life, so that no painful intelligence could find him more or less unprepared than his wife to meet it.

It needed the frequent repetition of this belief to himself, the frequent repetition of the grounds on which it was founded, to enable James Dugdale to subdue the apprehensions inspired by Hayes Meredith's letter. His delicate health, his nervous

susceptibility, the almost feminine sensitiveness of his temperament, made suspense, anxiety, and apprehension peculiarly trying to him; and the servants at Chayleigh, keener observers than their master, quickly found out that something was wrong with Mr. Dugdale, and that the arrival of the two gentlemen from foreign parts, for whose reception preparations were being duly made, would not be a cause of unalloyed pleasure to him.

The urgency of Meredith's request, that there might be no delay in a meeting between himself and Margaret, gave James much uneasiness, because, in addition to the general vagueness of the matter, he did not in this particular instance know what to do. Hayes Meredith did not wish her to be alarmed (which looked as if he believed her to be ignorant of the unpleasant intelligence to which he alluded, as if

he contemplated the necessity of its being broken to her with caution), but he laid stress on the necessity of an immediate meeting. How was this to be accomplished? Meredith had not thought of such a contingency as that which actually existed. He had supposed it probable Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin would be in Scotland when his letter should reach James Dugdale, which must create a delay of a few days indeed, but he had not contemplated their absence at such a distance as must imply the postponement of a meeting for weeks.

James did not know what to do. To summon Margaret and Mr. Baldwin to return at once, without any clue to the meaning of the communication awaiting them, would be to alarm them to an extent, which, under any circumstances within the reach of his imagination, must be unneces-

sary; and from the possible responsibility involved in not procuring their return he naturally shrank. He could not communicate with Meredith, whose letter bore no address but 'Liverpool'; there was nothing for it but the painful process of patience.

Mr. Carteret talked of Margaret more than usual in the interval between the arrival of Meredith's letter and the day on which he was expected at Chayleigh; the association of ideas made him garrulous, and he expatiated largely to James upon the pleasure which Mr. Meredith would feel on seeing his *protégée* of the bad old times so differently circumstanced, and the splendid hospitality with which he would certainly be entertained at the Deane. Baldwin would return sooner than he had intended, no doubt, in consequence of Mr. Meredith's visit to England.

When Mr. Carteret expressed his opinion,

apparently oblivious of the fact that the state of Margaret's health rendered her remaining abroad peculiarly desirable, James heard him with a sense of partial relief. It would be much gained, let the unpleasant business before them be what it might, if Mr. Carteret could be kept from alarm or pain in connection with it. If he could be brought to regard the sudden return of Margaret as a natural event, considering his placid nature and secluded habits, it might be readily practicable to secure him from all knowledge of what had occurred.

There was strong anticipative consolation for James Dugdale in this reflection. Reason with himself as he would, strive against it as he might, there was a presentiment of evil upon James's heart, a thrill of dread of the interruption of that happiness in which he found such pure and disinterested delight, and he dared not think

of such a dread extending itself to the old man, who had built such an edifice of pride and contentment on his daughter's fortunes, and would have so little strength to bear, not alone its crumbling, but any shock to its stability.

'Let it be what it may, I think it can be hidden from him,' said James Dugdale, as he bade Mr. Carteret good-night for the last time before all his suspense should be resolved into certainty.

That particular aspect of nature, to which the complacent epithets 'good old English' have been most frequently applied by poets and novelists, presented itself at Chayleigh, in perfection, on the day of Hayes Meredith's arrival. 'Our English summer' has become rather mythical in this generation, and the most bearable kind of cold weather, keen, bright, frosty, kindly

(to those who can afford ubiquitous fires and double windows), occurs in miserably small proportion to the dull, damp, despairing winter of fogs and rain. It was not so between twenty and thirty years ago, however, and the eyes of the long-expatriated Englishman were refreshed, and those of his colonial-born son astonished, by the beauty and novelty of the scenery through which they passed on their journey southwards.

Chayleigh was one of those places which look particularly beautiful in winter. It boasted splendid evergreens, and grassy slopes carefully kept, and the holly trees, freshly glistening after a fall of snow, which had just disappeared, were grouped about the low picturesque house like ideal trees in a fancy sketch of the proper home of Christmas. It was difficult to realise that the only dwellers in the pleasant house, from whose long low windows innumerable

lights twinkled brightly, were two men, the one old in years, and older still in his quiet ways, in his deadness of sympathy with the outer world, the other declining also in years, and carrying, in a frail and suffering body, a heart quite purged of self, but heavy-laden with trouble for one far dearer than self had ever been to him.

Fair women and bright children should have tenanted such a home as that to which Mr. Carteret, a little later than the hour at which they were expected, bade Hayes Meredith and his son a hearty if somewhat old-fashioned welcome.

When the post-chaise which brought the travellers stopped, James Dugdale met his old friend as he stepped out, and the two looked at each other with the contending feelings of pain and pleasure which such a meeting was calculated to produce. Time had so altered each that the other

would not have recognised him, had their meeting been a chance one ; but when, a little later, they regarded each other more closely, many familiar looks and expressions, turns of feature and of phrase, made themselves observed in both, which restored the old feeling of familiarity.

Then James Dugdale saw the strong, frank, hopeful young man, with his vivacious black eyes, and his strong limbs, his cheery laugh, and his jovial self-reliant temper once more, and found all those qualities again in the world-taught, and the world-sobered, but not world-worn man whose gray hair was the only physical mark of time set upon him.

Then Hayes Meredith saw the pale, stooped student, with form awry and spiritual sensitive face, bearing upon it the inexplicable painful expression which malformation gives,—the keen intelligence, the sadly

strong faculty of suffering—the equally keen affections and firm will. Time had set many a mark upon James. He had had rich brown curls, the only gift of youth dealt lavishly to him by nature, but they were gone now, and his hair was thin and gray, and the lines in his face were more numerous and deeper than might have been fitting at twenty additional years. But Hayes Meredith saw that same face under the lines, and in a wonderfully short time he found himself saying to himself—‘I should feel as if we were boys together again, only that Dugdale, poor fellow, never was a boy.’

‘Is Mrs. Baldwin here?’ was Meredith’s first question to his friend, after the undemonstrative English greeting, which said so little and meant so much.

‘No, she is abroad.’

‘How unfortunate!’

‘What is the matter? Is anything very wrong?’

‘No, no, we’ll put it right—but we cannot talk of it now. When can I have some time with you quite alone?’

‘To-night, if you are not too tired,’ returned James, who was intensely impatient to hear what had to be told, but to whose sensitive nerves the strong, steady, almost unconcerned manner of his friend conveyed some little assurance.

‘To-night, then.’

There was no farther private conversation between the two. Hayes Meredith devoted himself to Mr. Carteret, whose placid character afforded him considerable amusement, in its contrast with those of the bustling and energetic companions of his ordinary life. To Mr. Carteret, Hayes Meredith was an altogether new and delightful *trouvaille*. That he came from a new world, of

infinite interest and importance to England ; that he could tell of his own personal experience, particulars of the great events, political, commercial, and social, to which colonial enterprise had given rise ; that, as a member of a strange community, with all the interest of a foreign land, and all the sympathy of fellowship of race attaching to them, Mr. Carteret knew, if he had cared to think about it, and he might perhaps, merely as an intellectual exercise, have comprehended, that there was something remarkable about his guest in that aspect. But he did not care about it in the least. The political, social, and commercial life of either this half of the world or the other half was a matter of entire indifference to him. He was eminently desirous to ascertain, as soon as politeness warranted the inquiry, whether Mr. Meredith had brought to England the ‘specimens’ which James

Dugdale had bespoken, and that point satisfactorily disposed of, and an early hour on the following day appointed for their disinterment from the general mass of luggage, he turned the conversation without delay on the cranial peculiarities of ‘black fellows,’ the number of species into which the marsupial genus may be divided, and the properties of the turpentine tree. On all these matters Hayes Meredith sustained a very creditable examination, and during its course rapidly arrived at a very kindly feeling towards his gentle and eccentric but eminently kind-hearted entertainer. There was a curious occult sympathy between the minds of James Dugdale and Hayes Meredith, as the latter thought :

‘If it could be hidden from the poor old gentleman, and I really see no reason why he should ever know it, what a good thing it will be !’

Mr. Carteret had taken an early opportunity of expressing, not ungracefully, his sense of the kindness which his daughter had received at the hands of Mr. Meredith and his family, and his regret that she was not then at Chayleigh to welcome him. The embarrassment with which his guest received his courteous observations, and the little allusion which he afterwards made to Margaret, though it would have been natural that she should have been the prevailing subject of their conversation, did not strike Mr. Carteret in the least, though James Dugdale perceived it plainly and painfully, and it rendered the task which he had set himself—that of entertaining Robert Meredith—anything but easy. The mere notion of such a possibility as taking any notice of a boy, after having once shaken hands with him, and told him he was very happy to see him, and hoped he would make

himself quite at home at Chayleigh, would never have occurred to Mr. Carteret. About boys, as boys, he knew very little indeed; but if the word aversion could ever be used with propriety in describing a sentiment entertained by Mr. Carteret, he might be said to regard them with aversion. They made noises, they opened doors unnecessarily often, and they never shut them ; they trod on people's feet, and tore people's dresses; they did not wash their hands with decent frequency; and once a terrible specimen of the genus, having been admitted to a view of his precious case of Cape butterflies, thrust his plebeian and intrusive elbow through the glass. This was final.

'I don't like boys,' said Mr. Carteret; 'I don't understand them. Keep them away from me, please.'

He had listened with a mild shudder to Haldane's praises of that 'wonderfully

'clever child,' the eldest Miss Crofton's 'little brother;' and had turned a desperately deaf ear to all hints that an invitation for the urchin to inspect the wonders of the 'collection' might be regarded by the Crofton family as an attention.

'Wonderfully clever, is he?' said Mr. Carteret musingly; 'what a nuisance he must be!'

Haldane did not mention the talented creature again, and no boy had ever troubled Mr. Carteret from that hour until now. He had the satisfaction of knowing, when his prompt invitation was extended to James Dugdale's friends, that Robert Meredith was a big boy—not an objectionable child, with precocious ideas, prying eyes, and fingers addicted to mischief—had it been otherwise, his patience and hospitality would have been sorely tried.

'You will see to the young gentleman,

Foster,' he had said to his confidential servant; 'I daresay he will like a good deal to eat and drink, and you can see that he does not wear strong boots in the house, and—ah—hem, Foster, you can make him understand — politely, you know — that people in general don't go into my rooms. You understand, Foster ?'

'O yes, sir; I understand,' said Foster, in a tone which to Mr. Carteret's sensitive ears implied an almost unfeeling indifference, but Foster acted on the hint for all that, and the result was remarkable.

Mr. Carteret never once had reason to complain of Robert Meredith. The boy never vexed or worried him; he seemed to have an intuitive comprehension of his feelings and prejudices, of his harmless little oddities, and in a silent, distant kind of way—for though a wonderful exception, Robert was still a boy, and therefore to be

avoided—Mr. Carteret actually came to like him. In which particular he formed an exception to the entire household as then assembled at Chayleigh, and even when it received the accession of Mr. Baldwin, Margaret, and their little daughter. No one else in the house liked Robert Meredith.

The preoccupation of James Dugdale's mind, the anxiety and suspense of some days, which grew stronger and less endurable now when a few hours only divided him from learning, with absolute certainty, the evil tidings which Hayes Meredith had to communicate, rendered his friend's son and his affairs objects of very secondary interest to him. When he thought of the business which had induced Meredith to undertake such a voyage to England, such an absence from home, he roused himself to remember the keen interest he had taken in the father's projects for, and on

account of, the son. But he could only remember it; he could not feel it again. When he should know the worst, when he and Meredith should have had their private talk that night, then things would resume their proper proportion, then he should be able to fulfil all his friend's behests, with the aid of his hand and his heart alike. But now, only the face of Margaret, pale, wan, stern, with the youth and bloom gone from it, as he had seen her when she first came home; only the face of Margaret, transfigured in the light of love and joy, of pride and pleasure, as he had seen her last, held his attention. Her form seemed to flit before him in the air. The sound of her voice mingled, to his fancy, with all other sounds. The effort to control his feelings, and bide his time, almost surpassed his strength. Afterwards, when he recalled that day, and tried to remember

his impressions of Robert Meredith, James recollects him as a quiet, gentlemanly, self-possessed boy, with a handsome face, a good figure, and an intelligent expression —a little shy, perhaps, but James did not see that until afterwards. A boy without the objectionable habits of boys, but also without the frankness which beseems boyhood. A boy who watched Mr. Carteret's conversation with his father, and rapidly perceived that gentleman's harmless eccentricities, and who, when he found that a total absence of observation was one of them, marked each fresh exhibition of them with a contemptuous sneer, which would not have been out of place on the countenance of a full-grown demon. He had a good deal of the early-reached decision in opinion and in manner which is a feature in most young colonials, but he was not unpleasantly ‘bumptious;’ and James Dugdale, had his

mind been free to permit him to find pleasure in anything, would have enjoyed making the acquaintance of his old friend's son.

At length the two men found themselves alone in James Dugdale's room.

'Our consultation' is likely to be a long one, Dugdale,' said Meredith, as he seated himself close by the fire. 'Is there any danger of our being interrupted or overheard?'

'None whatever,' James answered. He felt unable to speak, to ask a question, now that the time had come.

Meredith looked at him compassionately, but shrugged his shoulders at the same time, imperceptibly. He understood his friend's sensitiveness; his weakness he could not understand. 'I may as well tell you at once,' he said, 'about this bad business.' He took a paper from a pocket-book as he

spoke. ‘Tell me the exact date of Mr. Baldwin’s marriage.’

James named it without adding a word. Then Meredith handed him the paper he held, and James, having read it hastily, looked up at him with a pale horrified face.

CHAPTER V.

CONSULTATION.

THE paper which caused James Dugdale such painful emotion was a certificate of the identification and burial of the body of Godfrey Hungerford, and was dated rather more than a year after the marriage of his supposed widow with Fitzwilliam Meriton Baldwin, and two years and five months later than the period at which his death in the bush had been reported to Margaret.

In reply to the eager questions which James asked him, when he had somewhat recovered his composure, Hayes Meredith told his companion that he had the best of

all confirmation of the truth of the statement which that document set forth—that of his own eyes. There was not the faintest hope of error, not the slightest chance that in this matter any trick, any design to extort money was concerned. That such might be the case had been Hayes Meredith's first idea, when, as he told James Dugdale, he had received a mysterious communication from a 'pal' of Hungerford's, who was anything but favourably known to the Melbourne police, to the effect that the supposed murdered man was alive, and might be found, under an assumed name, in a wretched hovel in one of the poorest and least reputable quarters of the town.

'It was necessary to satisfy myself about the thing without delay,' said Meredith; 'and I did not lose an hour. I met the messenger at the place appointed in the

note, and told him, if any one had formed the goodly scheme of deceiving me by personating Hungerford, it would signally fail. I could not be deceived on such a point, and should simply expose the fraud at once. On the other hand, if this man, who appeared, from the other fellow's report, to be in a rapidly dying state, should really prove to be Hungerford, I could not understand his applying to me, on whom he had no claim whatever, and should certainly not get the chance of establishing one. The man, a seedy gambler, whom I remembered having seen with Hungerford,—his name was Oakley,—said he had no intention to deceive me. They were “pals” in misfortune and misery, Hungerford and himself, and wanted nothing but a little help from me. Hungerford had been saved from murder by a black woman, and had wandered for months, enduring an amazing

amount of suffering. How so self-indulgent a dog as he was ever bore it, I can't understand; but he had a love of life in him I have never seen equalled; he clung to life, and fought for it madly, when his agonies in the hospital were perfectly unbearable to see. After some time, they struck the trail of such civilisation as is going in the remoter districts of our part of the world; and Hungerford got away, and one of the first persons he fell in with was this Oakley. He did not give me a very clear account of what they did, and, as you may suppose, I was not very anxious to know; it was very likely all the harm in their power, at all events; they both made cause for themselves to be chary of recognition, and afraid of the strong arm of the law.'

'Did this Oakley mention Margaret?'

'Only cursorily. He said they had been

forced to venture into Melbourne, and he had “asked about” and discovered that Mrs. Hungerford had lived quietly and respectably, presumably by my assistance, after her husband left her, and had sailed for England when the news of his death was spread in Melbourne. He said Hungerford was glad when he found his wife had got away safely; he could never hope to rise in this world any more, and he did not wish her to suffer any farther.’

‘The ruffian acknowledged his wickedness, then?’ said James.

‘Well, yes, he did; I must say he did. I went on to the hospital with Oakley, and saw in a moment there was no mistake about it. The man lying there, in the last stage of destitution, and of that peculiar depth of loathsome disease which only comes from drink, was certainly Godfrey Hungerford. I need not tell you what I

felt, as I looked at him and thought of his unconscious wife. I had your letter, telling me about her being at Chayleigh, in my pocket-book at the time.'

'No, you need not tell me,' said James; 'it must have been most horrible.'

'It was just that,' said Meredith, with a rueful look and a shake of the head; 'such a miserable creature as he was to see, I hope I never may have to look at again. I said very little to him—nothing about Margaret. He did thank me in a rough kind of way, and said he knew if he could get me communicated with I would help him.'

'Did he not ask you if you knew anything of Margaret after she left Melbourne? Did he show no anxiety for her fate?'

'No; I think in addition to his natural heartlessness and selfishness his mind was much enfeebled by disease at this time, and

he was sinking fast. He had no friend, no acquaintance, he told me, but Oakley; and I was careful to ask him whether Oakley was the only person who knew that he was still alive, and then in Melbourne. He declared to me that such was the case. I told him I asked in case he should recover, when, if he knew any other persons, I might try to interest them in his case. But I am certain that in this instance he told the truth. He was entered on the books of the hospital as John Perry, and had not borne his own name during all the months of his wandering life. He went off into a short slumber while I sat by him, and strange thoughts came into my mind as I looked at his wretched, vice-worn, poverty-stricken face, and thought of what he must have been when he first came across that fine young creature's path, and even what he was when I went to see them at your

request. I assure you he had even then good looks and a pleasant manner, and scoundrel as I knew him to be, greater scoundrel as I afterwards found him, I could not altogether wonder that that woman had cared for him once.'

'Poor girl, poor girl,' said James. His elbows were on the table, and his face rested on his clasped hands. His hollow eyes looked out eagerly at Hayes Meredith, whose strength and composure formed a touching contrast to his nervous weakness.

'To go on with my story,' Meredith continued: 'I told Hungerford I should see him again, and left money for his use; Oakley was to let me know how he was; and when I left him I took a long walk, as my way is when I am puzzled, so as to get time to think it out. My first impulse was to write to you at once, but I discarded the suggestion on more mature con-

sideration. Everything must, of course, depend on whether the man lived or died. The one was almost too bad to fear, the other was almost too good to hope for. Among your letters there was one in which I recollect you had told me all the particulars of Margaret's marriage, and the peculiar circumstances of Mr. Baldwin's property. I went home, after a long and anxious cogitation, during which I made up my mind, at all events, not to write; and read this letter. Here are the memoranda I made from it.'

He laid a long slip of paper on the table before James, who glanced anxiously at it, but did not take it up.

' You see, Dugdale,' continued Meredith, after he had mended the fire, and thrown himself back in his chair, with his hands extended, and the finger tips joined in an attitude of demonstration, ' this mat-

ter has more than one side to it; more than the side I can see you are dwelling on, very painfully, and very naturally—Margaret's feelings. As for that part of it, it is dreadful, of course; but then she need never know any of the particulars.'

'I hope not—I trust not,' said Dugdale in a low constrained voice. 'If I know anything of her, the idea of the scene you describe taking place while she was in the midst of happiness and luxury would make her wretched for many a day. Think of her having to endure that, after having already lived through the horror of believing that the man she had loved, and sacrificed herself for, was murdered.'

Meredith looked at James, closely and inquiringly, for a moment. This intense comprehension, this almost painful truth and excess of sympathy, puzzled him. While the external consequences of the discovery

which had been made, the results to Mrs. Baldwin herself, her husband, and her child pressed upon his own attention, James was lost in the sentimental bearing of the matter, in the retrospective personal grief which it must cause to Margaret, estimating her feelings at a high degree of refinement and intensity. Meredith could not make this out very clearly, but thinking ‘it is just like him; he always was a strange dreamy creature, who never looked at anything like other people,’ he went on to discuss the subject from his own point of view.

‘That is all very true, Dugdale,’ he continued, ‘and, as I said before, I really do not see that she need ever know more than the fact stated in that paper. But what you and I have got to consider, without unnecessary delay, and to act upon with all possible promptitude, is this fact: at the present moment Margaret is not Mr.

Baldwin's wife, and her daughter, who, if I understand your statement aright, is heiress to all her father's property, is illegitimate.'

'The child would inherit all if there were no son,' said James.

'Precisely so. Now, you see, Dugdale, this is the great question. If we can contrive to inform Mr. Baldwin of what has happened, and get him to break it as gently as possible to Margaret, and then have them married privately, of course there need not be any difficulty about that; and without an hour's unnecessary delay things may be all right, and no one in the world but ourselves and themselves a bit the wiser. If the first child had been a son, it would indeed have been a bad, a hopeless business; but the little girl will be no worse off if her mother has a son, and I daresay she will have half-a-dozen. Cheer up, Dug-

dale; you see it is not so black as it looked at first; there is some unpleasantness to be gone through, and then you will see all will come right.'

'Perhaps,' said Dugdale dubiously. The expression of pain and foreboding deepened in his face with every moment. 'But it is a dreadful misfortune. Margaret lives for that child; she loves it wonderfully; she will break her heart over the knowledge that little Gerty is illegitimate, though no one in the world but herself should ever know it.'

'Nonsense,' said Meredith, 'she will do nothing of the kind; or, if she does, she must be a very different woman from the Mrs. Hungerford I knew; she must be much softer both of head and of heart.'

'She *is* a very different woman,' said James, 'and her heart is softer. I never saw anything like the influence happiness

has had upon her, and I dread, more than I can express, the change which such a blow as this falling upon her in the midst of her joy, and when her health is delicate too, may produce.'

'Her health delicate, is it?' said Meredith. 'Ah, by the bye, you said so when you mentioned her being abroad. Another child expected?'

'I believe so.'

'By Jove, that's good news! Why, don't you see, Dugdale, that sets it all right. Ten chances to one this will be a boy, and there's the rightful heir to the Deane for you! Look here'—he took the memorandum from the table—'all landed property entailed—just so—provision for younger children to be made out of funded property, and the very large savings of Baldwin's minority and also the savings from their income, which are likely to be

considerable, as the estates are rising rapidly in value—a coal-mine having been discovered on the Deane’—he laid the paper down, rose, and walked briskly about the room. ‘The little girl’s position will not be in the least altered. Baldwin must settle the money upon her in some special way; whatever her share of the provision made for younger children may be, the boy would naturally succeed, and all the difficulty be thus gotten over.’

‘How would it be if there were no other child?’ said James.

‘Ah! that would, indeed, be difficult,’ replied Meredith; ‘I don’t know what could be done then. Mr. Baldwin is not the sort of man to do a thing which certainly would be wrong in the abstract, though I cannot see the practical injustice of it; in the case of there being no other child, of course the rightful heir is the individual who would

inherit in case Baldwin should die without heirs.'

'Lady Davystry then,' said James.

'Baldwin's sister? Yes—then she is the heir. She is not likely to marry, is she?'

'Quite certain not to do so, I should say.'

'I fancy she would consent to anything that should be proposed in her brother's interests—if any proposal on the subject should ever become necessary. And after her?'

'I don't know. It must be some very distant relative, for I never heard the name mentioned, or the contingency alluded to.'

'Well, well, we need not think about it. In fact we are wandering away altogether from the only subjects we have to discuss: the best means of getting the Baldwins home without alarming them, and the

most expeditious way of having them married privately, but with all legal security, so that if ever any clue to this unfortunate occurrence should be obtained by any one interested, the rights of the heir may be secured beyond the possibility of injury.'

'Yes; we must be careful of that,' said James; but his tone was absent, and he was evidently unable to take any comfort from Meredith's cheerful view of the circumstances. Then, after a short pause, he said, 'I am very ignorant of law, but I have a kind of notion that we may be tormenting ourselves unnecessarily. I have heard that in Scotland the marriage of parents subsequent to the birth of children renders them legitimate. Would not this marriage legitimatise little Gerty ?'

'Certainly not,' said Meredith, and he almost smiled; 'this is a very different case. The truth is, Margaret has uncon-

sciously committed bigamy, and when Gertrude Baldwin was born, not only was Margaret not Mr. Baldwin's wife, but she actually was Godfrey Hungerford's.'

James Dugdale shrunk from the words as though they had been blows. What was this but the truth which he had known from the moment he cast his eyes upon the paper which Meredith had put into his hands? and yet, set thus broadly before him, it seemed far more awful. What had become of all the arguments he had addressed to himself now? Where was the assurance he had felt that fate could not harm Margaret? that evil or calumny, or the dead and gone disgraces of her dark days, could not touch Mrs. Baldwin, in her pride of place, and in her perfect happiness? Where were the plausibilities with which he had striven to lull his fears to rest? All gone, vanished, as dead as the exultant

pleasure with which he had read Margaret's letter on that bright morning, which might have been a hundred years ago, so distant, so out of his sight, did it now appear. He covered his face with his hands, and kept silence for some time.

During the interval Meredith paced the room thoughtfully. When at length James spoke, it was not in continuation of the last subject.

'How long did he—Hungerford, I mean—live after you saw him?'

'Only a few days. Oakley came to me one morning, and told me he was dying, and wished to see me. I went, but he was not sensible, and he never rallied again. Then I had him buried, rather more decently than in hospital style, under his assumed name. Oakley signed this paper, as you see. He had no notion I attached any specific value or interest to its con-

tents—I believe he thought it an oddity of mine, one of my business-like ways, to have everything in black and white. But I considered that I might not live to tell you this by word of mouth, and in that case I should have forwarded the evidence to you, or you might not live to hear from me, and in that case I must have proof to put before Mr. Baldwin.'

' You did quite right,' said James.

' Where is Oakley ?'

' I gave him a trifle to get up a decent appearance, and he was trying to get employment as a clerk or bookkeeper in some of the third-rate places of business, when I left,' said Meredith ; ' he was rather a clever fellow, though a great scamp. Perhaps poverty has steadied him, and he may get on. At all events, I have seen too much of successful blackguardism, I suppose—one sees a deal of it in colonial life,

to be sure—to condemn unsuccessful black-guardism to starving.'

'He is positively the only person in possession of this lamentable secret on your side of the world?'

'Positively the only person, and as he knows nothing whatever concerning Margaret—not whether she is still alive, indeed—and, I presume, never heard her maiden name or her father's place of abode, I should not think the slightest danger is ever to be, at any time, apprehended from him. And now, Dugdale, let us be practical. I am getting tired, and yet I don't want to leave you to-night until we have finally arranged what is to be done. Mrs. Baldwin would have good reason to complain of us, if we left her in her present position an hour longer than we can possibly avoid.'

At this most true observation James

wincing. His heart and his fancy were alike busy, realising every element of pain in Margaret's position.

After some more discussion, it was arranged between the friends that a letter should be written to Mr. Baldwin of a strictly confidential nature, in which he should be urged to bring his wife to England without delay—the pretext being left to him to assign—and that James and Meredith should meet Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin in London. No explanation of their movements would be required by Mr. Carteret, and the whole affair of the revelation and the marriage could then be quietly managed without exciting suspicion in any quarter.

‘Well, that’s settled, old fellow,’ said Meredith, as he shook Dugdale’s hand heartily, ‘and we will bring Margaret back here as surely Baldwin’s wife as she now

believes herself to be, and nothing more will ever come out of this business. It looked much uglier at a distance than it does near, I assure you.'

But James made no reply to his friend's cheery speech. He went sadly to his room, and sat before the fire pondering. The flames flickered and danced, and sent odd reflections over his face, but the thoughtful, painful gaze never relaxed, the abstraction of the hollow eyes never lessened, and the slow coming dawn of the wintry day found him still there, and still thinking, sadly and painfully.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RETURN.

No time was lost by James Dugdale in acting upon the resolution which had been arrived at by him and his friend. The task of writing to Mr. Baldwin was one of the most painful which it had ever been his lot to fulfil, and as his pen traced the lines destined to carry such dismay, to cause such irremediable grief to his friend, and to the woman whom he had loved so well and so patiently, he thought somewhat bitterly of the strangeness of his fate. Twice he had been destined to traverse Margaret's path in the bright hours of her existence, twice he had been appointed to convey to

her words of disappointment, of bitterness, of doom. Life had given him little, he thought, in proportion to that which he had been called upon to suffer. Only one human creature was very precious to him, and he was so little to her that she would never even comprehend the misery he had to suffer, and must still suffer, through her. A general sort of sympathy she would expect from him and recognise, but she would never know that he would cheerfully have borne anything in the shape of suffering that could have been devised, to save her from the knowledge of the facts which his hand was then recording on the paper so soon to meet and blast Fitz-william Baldwin's eyes. He had sometimes thought, just before her marriage, that Margaret had divined and partly penetrated his secret; but she did not think of it now, he felt assured, even if she had.

All the fulness and beauty of life, all its best and brightest possibilities, had been opened to her, had been given to her in such lavish abundance, that her mind had no room for anything outside its own felicity.

Thus James thought; but in thus thinking he did not rightly understand Margaret. Her mind was more capacious, her nature was more stedfast, than he knew, and she had measured the depth and the strength of his love for her more accurately than he guessed, and held it in more dear, grateful, and compassionate remembrance than he would have dared to hope. At the very time when he was writing to her, Margaret, in her sunny Italian home, was thinking and talking of James to her husband and to Lady Davyntry, who had always entertained much regard for Mr. Dugdale of an unintelligible nature, for she

admitted readily that she did not understand him.

‘Nothing could be more acceptable to Gerty’s godfather,’ Margaret was saying, ‘than a portrait of Gerty—and of me. He shall have the small one we have ordered; and the large one for papa must be begun as soon as we get his answer to my last letter.’

‘You ought to have heard from him before this about it, Madge, should you not?’ asked Lady Davytry, looking up from her work; ‘it is time for a letter.’

‘Not quite, according to papa’s measurement, Nelly. He generally takes a fortnight to make up his mind about any question he is asked, and then another fortnight to put the result on paper. I had a letter from James, you know, but he said nothing about the picture.’

‘We’ll have it begun at once, Margaret,’

said Mr. Baldwin, who was standing by the verandah, looking out upon the shining, blue, foam-flecked sea. ‘I don’t like a thing of that kind being put off. I wonder Dugdale does not answer for your father. And, by the bye,’ he continued, crossing the room, and taking a seat beside his wife, ‘they are tolerably busy just now at Chayleigh ; it must be about the time of Mr. Meredith’s arrival. What date did Dugdale mention ?’

‘He thought about the 25th,’ said Margaret.

As she spoke, the colour in her cheek waned, and there was a slight change in the expression of her face, which was a bright face now, but always mobile and a sure index to her feelings; a change which indicated to her husband, on whom no look of hers was ever lost, that the mention of Hayes Meredith’s name had a disturbing

effect upon her. He saw it, and understood it, and it vexed him, for, not with, her.

This was the one weakness in Margaret which troubled her perfect peace and happiness, and through them his. Not all the unequalled contentment of her lot had power to obliterate the past for her so completely as to deprive association of its power to wound.

There was one evil which all her husband's love and care could not keep quite away from her—the dark shadow of the bad bygone days when he as yet had no place in her life. She tried hard to fulfil her promise to her husband; she lived for him as truly and completely as ever any woman lived for any man, and she was a wonderfully happy human being.

But this one weakness clung to her still. The feeling of dread, misgiving, reluctance with which she had heard at first

of Hayes Meredith's intention of coming to England, had never changed or lessened. She tried to escape from it, to forget it; she condemned her own weakness much more severely than Mr. Baldwin condemned it, but there it remained all the same, as present as if she had not condemned it at all. She had felt that she escaped much by being abroad when Mr. Meredith should arrive, she had blushed for her ingratitude in feeling it, she had persuaded herself that when he should have arrived, and she should know that he was in England, this strange, for the present unconquerable, feeling might wear off. It must be in a great measure nervous, she thought; it had come upon her so often and oppressively before her child's birth—surely it would vanish then. Time had brought her such immeasurably rich compensation, 'good measure, pressed down, and running over,' she had but this one

thing more to ask of time, and that would come.

It was on a glorious day, even for Naples, that Fitzwilliam Baldwin, happily alone when it arrived, received James Dugdale's letter. Margaret, her child, and Lady Davystry had gone out, intending to remain away for some hours, to the villa of friends of Eleanor's, who rejoiced immensely in the society of the English family. Mr. Baldwin was to join them in the afternoon, a sociable arrangement tending to rescue the ladies from boredom, without subjecting the gentleman to the same.

The writing of the letter which came to the beautiful villa by the sea, that glorious day, had been attended with difficulties which are not easily described. Partly from his knowledge of the man, and partly from the gift of insight and sympathy which he possessed in a rare degree, James Dugdale

could enter into the perplexity and intricacy of the trouble of which he was the harbinger, and could follow the inevitable workings of Mr. Baldwin's mind under the circumstances. Meredith had at first proposed that the truth should not be told to Baldwin, that he should only be prepared for important news of an unpleasant character, and urged to return as speedily as possible. But James would not agree to this.

'No,' he said, 'the truth must be told, and borne somehow; and a plain simple statement of it to a man like Baldwin is the best thing to be done, and will enable him to bear it best. If he is kept in suspense, he will be unable to keep her from suspicion, and that is the great point for him to secure.'

That Mr. Baldwin would exert himself to the utmost to conceal his feelings

until they reached England, James did not doubt; and that he would acquiesce in their view of the case he felt assured. With this view, and in this spirit, the terrible letter was written; how it was read, how the full knowledge of the meaning of its contents was endured, no human being ever knew.

In the midst of the great bewilderment which fell upon Fitzwilliam Baldwin, while he sat with his eyes fixed upon Dugdale's letter, in the midst of the rush of wildly-varying but all-painful feeling which took possession of him, two things were uppermost in his mind: the one that the news which had reached him might be hidden until their arrival in England from Margaret, the other that the birth of a son would set this dreadful matter right, as far as it was capable of rectification.

As the hours during which he was absorbed in deep and agonising reverie wore

away, he saw these two points more and more clearly, and began to take comfort from them. Dugdale had laid so much stress in his letter upon the certainty of the truth being known to no one but Meredith and himself, upon the feasibility of such prompt and ready action, that it would be necessary only to let Margaret learn the need of the second marriage ceremony just before the time of its performance, and upon the fortunate circumstance that the little one so unintentionally wronged would be placed beyond the reach of injury when the expected event should have taken place, that the heart-stricken reader could not but see the force of his arguments.

He thought very little of himself in all this. A swift sharp pang of regret when he felt that he had failed in the great task he had set himself, the high privilege he

had striven for—that the woman whom he loved with such love as his experience told him men very rarely had to bestow, was not placed by that love, and all the defences with which it had surrounded her, beyond the reach of the stings of fortune—a piercing, agonising sense of defeat, of failure,—and all he suffered in his own person, on his own account, was finished and over. But for *her*, for Margaret—she who, in the midst of her happiness, in the summertide of her pride, and the security of her good fortune, dreaded the slightest, most passing reference to the past, whose sensitiveness and delicacy was tortured even now with a sense of degradation in the clinging of the old associations of the past—for her, he suffered as much as it was in his nature—which had largely the faculty of pain—to suffer.

When the time drew near at which he

must prepare to meet Margaret, to find himself under her calm, but, where he was concerned, keen observation, forced to deceive her in fact, and to feign a state of spirits utterly foreign to the truth, he started up with a sudden fear that the havoc which had been at work within him might have made its mark upon his face. He knew that his wife—and when the dear familiar word came into his thoughts, he shuddered at the sudden realisation it forced upon him of the awful truth, she was not his wife—that Margaret would detect trouble in his face with unerring keenness and certainty.

He must devise a pretext for their sudden return, Dugdale had said in the letter. Of course, and it must be found, must be decided upon, at once. He stood still before a mirror and looked at his face. It was pale and haggard, as though he had

gone through a long illness, and had grown suddenly older in it. The pretext which would account to Margaret for this face of his must needs be a serious one. And if it must, why not make it the true pretext? Could he devise to tell her any trouble, loss, or calamity affecting him which she would not share to the full? Were they not, indeed, and in the holiest truth of that mysterious tie of love, one? Would she not grieve as much for an imaginary evil, if it could thus affect him, as for the real cross which she would have to carry? At first, his wondering gaze upon his own changed face in the glass, Fitzwilliam Baldwin thought—‘Yes, I may as well tell her the truth; she cannot take it worse than she will take anything affecting me only!’

But, again, a little reflection stopped him. If the truth were revealed to Margaret now, it would be so far different from

any trouble that could come to them in the ordinary course of their united life, that it must sever them. From the instant that Margaret should know that she was not his wife there would be no more liberty for her, but restraint between them, and the action of a feeling which would take strong root in her delicate and sensitive mind. No, he must guard her, as her warm-hearted but cool-judging friends had decided, against the discovery—he should win her forgiveness afterwards for a small deception involving so much to be gained in this terrible crisis of their fate.

He roamed from room to room of the beautiful villa overhanging the sea, and looked drearily around him on all the familiar objects associated with their everyday life. They were all familiar, true, and yet they were so strange. On them all there was the impress of the dreariness and the

desolation which sweeps in the wake of a great shock, of a sudden event after which life can never again be the same, over all the soulless things in the midst of which we live. These were Margaret's rooms, and she was flitting about them when he saw her and them last, and they could never look the same again—neither they nor Margaret. Could it be true? Was it real, or a dream?

He stopped and pulled out James's letter, and read it again; and once more the full terrible reality struck him as with a palpable physical blow. This, then, was the fulfilment of that vague dread which Margaret confessed to having felt, that 'superstitious terror' which had pursued her often when her life was fullest of blessings and happiness. James Dugdale had not erroneously estimated the confidence which he believed to exist between Fitz-

william Baldwin and Margaret. It was thorough, perfect, absolute. There had not been a thought of her heart hidden from her husband, and therefore he was fully able to comprehend all the depth and bearing, the full weight and severity, of the calamity which had come upon them.

What a mockery was the beauty of the scene on which he looked! What warmth or light was there in the sunshine now—what music was there in the play of the bright waves upon the curving coast? Then he took himself to task for weakness. He ought to have stood the shock of even such intelligence better than this. Where were the strength and manliness which never before had failed him? In other straits and trials of his life he had always manifested and been proud, after a fashion, of manifesting strength and composure; but in this they failed him. Strength had for-

saken his limbs, and there was no composure in the ashen face he looked at in the glass; for the chief weight of this crushing sorrow must fall, not on himself, but on one much dearer—on her whose happiness he had set before him as the chief aim and effort of his life.

There was a common-sense practical point of view in which he ought to look at it—the point of view in which Dugdale's letter had placed it, the point of view which was so much more clearly perceptible to Hayes Meredith than to James. After all, the evil was transient, if irreparable; and the proposed precautions, taken with good will and with good sense, could not fail. But Fitzwilliam Baldwin was not quite master of himself in this crisis; a touch of the same presentiment which had haunted Margaret came now to him, and made him tremble before an undefined dread dimly

looming behind the clear and ascertained truth.

When he set himself seriously to decide upon the pretext by which he should account to Margaret for the sudden change of all their plans, Mr. Baldwin was not slow about finding one.

Margaret knew little in detail of the management and circumstances of the large property of which she was the mistress. This ignorance arose neither from incapacity nor from lack of interest, but came solely from a little of the ‘Lady-Burleigh’ feeling, combined with the full occupation of her mind in the delights of her home and her household, and the idea that she always had time before her for the acquisition of a knowledge of what she called ‘Fitzwilliam’s office business.’ Lady Davyntry was not much wiser; indeed, she rather trusted to her brother’s knowing all

about her affairs, and transacting all business relating to Davystry, than troubled herself with inquiry into matters regarding the Deane.

The pretext, then, should be a letter from the factor at the Deane, and urgent interests of the property at stake, requiring the master's presence. Lady Davystry, he knew, would immediately propose that she and Margaret should remain at Naples until Mr. Baldwin should have transacted his business, to which he must be careful to lend a sufficiently unpleasant aspect, and be able to rejoin them. But Mr. Baldwin knew he might make his mind easy on that score. Certain as he was that his sister would make this proposition—which, under the circumstances, and especially in consideration of Margaret's situation, would be eminently and palpably reasonable—he was at least as certain that Margaret would

not consent to remaining at Naples if he had to leave her. He might safely trust to the gently-maintained but perfectly-assured self-will of Margaret under such circumstances ; and this confidence reduced the difficulties of his task very considerably.

His plan was all arranged, and the first rush of the sea of his troubles had subsided, when he mounted his horse (Mr. Baldwin's horses were famous in Naples) and rode slowly away from the home in which he had been so happy,—so marvellously happy it seemed to him, now that the disturbing element had come in,—to meet Margaret, feeling like a man in a dream.

‘Something has happened! What is it?’ said Margaret in a whisper to her husband, as soon as he had gone through the formalities of the occasion, and she could approach

him without being remarked. ‘Is there any bad news from home? Is anything wrong with papa?’

‘Nothing, my darling. I have been upset by some unpleasant intelligence from Curtis. It is only a matter of business; you shall hear all about it when we get home.’

‘Only a matter of business. Thank God! But you look very ill, Fitzwilliam. Is it anything very wrong?’

‘Yes; it may involve me in much annoyance. But I cannot say more now. Don’t look so anxiously at me; I am not ill, only worried over the affair. Can you get away soon?’

‘Yes, immediately. I have only to gather up Eleanor and baby.’

She smiled faintly as she spoke, and he returned the smile more faintly still.

‘Gather them up, then, and let us go.’

The few minutes consumed in leave-taking were very tedious to Fitzwilliam Baldwin, and his pale face and uncontrollably absent manner did not pass unnoticed by the lady of the house.

'I am sure there is something the matter with Mr. Baldwin,' said Mrs. Sinclair to her husband, when the visitors had departed, a strange sort of gloom accompanying their leave-taking. 'Did you notice, William, how ill he looked?—just like a man who had seen a ghost.'

'Nonsense,' was the uncompromising reply of Mr. Sinclair; 'I daresay he is not well. You should not say such things before the children, Minnie; you'll see now we shall have them gravely demanding to be informed what is a ghost. What shall you do then?'

'Refer them to you, sir, as the source and dispenser of universal knowledge. And

it's all very well for you to say "nonsense;" but I am certain something is very wrong with Mr. Baldwin. However, if there is, we shall soon know it. I am sure I hope not, for his sister's sake.'

'And his wife's, surely; she is a very sweet creature.'

'I prefer Lady Davystry,' said Mrs. Sinclair shortly; and the conversation dropped.

Mr. Baldwin was perfectly right in his anticipation of the manner in which the communication he had to make to his 'womankind' would be received by them. Lady Davystry was very voluble, Margaret was very silent and closely observant of her husband.

'What a horrid nuisance, my dear Fitz!' said Lady Davystry; 'and I must say I think it is extremely stupid of Curtis. Of course I don't pretend to understand min-

ing business, and rights and royalties, and all the rest of it; but I do wonder he needs must bother you about it just now, when we are all so comfortable here, and Madge getting ever so much better. I suppose writing to these odious people would not do?"

'No, Eleanor, certainly not,' replied her brother; 'I must go to them, there's nothing else for it; I saw that at once.'

'Dear, how tiresome! And how long shall you be away, Fitz?'

'It is impossible to tell, Nelly; and I must start as soon as possible.—How soon can you be ready, Margaret?'

There was an extraordinary tenderness in his tone, something beyond the customary unfailing sweetness with which he invariably addressed her; a compassionate unconscious deference in his manner which thrilled her sensitive nerves. She had not

removed her gaze from her husband's face since he had made the communication which he had promised; but she had not spoken a word. Now she said simply, still looking at him:

'I can be ready to start to-morrow, if you are.'

'To start to-morrow, Madge!' exclaimed Lady Davystry in half-angry, half-incredulous astonishment. 'You cannot mean it. There was never such an idea entertained by Fitz, I am certain, as your going.—Of course you don't mean it?' And she turned anxiously to her brother.

'I certainly did think Margaret would come with me,' returned Mr. Baldwin.

'I assure you, Nelly,' said Margaret, 'nothing could induce me to remain here without him.'

Lady Davystry was very good-humoured, as she always was, but very voluble

and eager in her remonstrances. The discussion was somewhat of a relief to Mr. Baldwin, and it ended as he had foreseen it would end. Margaret and her little daughter would accompany him to England, and his sister would remain at Naples. The servants, with the exception of the child's nurse, were to be left at the villa. Mr. Baldwin had remembered that the absence of attendants on Margaret and himself would materially contribute to the maintenance of that secrecy which was so necessary. The simplicity of the personal habits of both rendered their travelling without servants a matter of surprise to no one.

‘ You are quite sure you will be back in a month, Fitz?’ Lady Davynty said at the close of the discussion, when she had accepted the inevitable with her usual unfailing cheerfulness, and was actually almost

ready to think the plan a very pleasant variety. ‘ You must, you know, for I don’t believe it would be safe for Margaret to travel after a longer time; and you know what Cooper said about March in England for her chest. And a month will give you time to settle all this bothering business. I really think I should get rid of Curtis, if I were you, and give Madge plenty of time to see Mr. Carteret. I have some lovely lava to send him; and, Madge, I will let you have the flat knife Signor Lanzi gave me, you know—the one they found in Pompeii. They say it belonged to Sallust’s cook, and he used to slap it on the dresser when dinner was ready to be served. Mr. Carteret would be delighted to have it; don’t you think so?’

‘ I am sure he would,’ Margaret answered absently.

Lady Davyntry went on: ‘ You mustn’t

worry about this business, Fitz; it is not like you to bother so about any mere matter of money.'

'It is more than a mere matter of money, Nelly,' said Mr. Baldwin hastily. 'But there, don't let us talk of it any more.—You will get ready to start on Wednesday, Margaret; and, please God, we shall all be here together again before long.'

He left the women together, and went away, pleading letters to be written for the mail in the morning. As he closed the door, Margaret's quick ear caught the sound of a heavy sigh. In her turn she thought what Eleanor had said, 'It is not like him to think so much of a mere matter of money;' for his explanation had not made it clear to her that anything more than money was concerned.

Her sister-in-law talked on and on to her, growing more excited by and better

pleased with the occurrences of the day as she did so, until she finally persuaded herself that no real harm, or even permanent unpleasantness, could come out of them to her brother. Margaret hardly heard her. Her heart was heavy and troubled; and that night, as she and her husband stood by the bed where their child was sleeping, watching the infant's happy slumber, as was their invariable custom, she gathered confirmation of her shapeless misgiving from the expression of his face, from the infinite tenderness of his tone to her, and the deep melancholy of the look he turned upon the child.

'Is there a shadow, a dread, a skeleton in *his* past too?' Margaret mused, when she was alone; 'and am I about to find it out? I thought there was nothing in all his noble history which needed an hour's concealment, or could bring a cloud to his

face. But I must, as surely I can, trust him. If there be more to tell than he has told,—and I think there must be, for what is a money risk to him and me?—it is my part to wait patiently until the time comes for me to know it. When he thinks it right, he will tell me; until then I ought to be satisfied, and I *will*. He said the chief part of his business would be in London; I shall hear all about it there.'

Calling to her aid her former habit of self-control,—a little fallen into disuse in the new and perfect happiness of her life, in which it was seldom needed,—Margaret did not embarrass Mr. Baldwin by a question, by the slightest betrayal that she suspected any concealment on his part; but she said to herself very frequently, in the brief interval before the commencement of their journey, ‘I shall learn the truth in London.’

The old presentiment which had once haunted her so constantly, which had been so readily awakened by the merest chimerical cause, of which she had felt guilty, ashamed, combating its influence by reasoning upon its ingratitude, its weakness, its unworthiness, had left her, it seemed, at this time. No shadow from the brooding wings of the terrific truth swept across her soul.

The journey was commenced at the appointed time, and safely accomplished, with as much celerity as was possible nearly thirty years ago.

On their arrival in London, the travellers went to a hotel in Bond-street, and Margaret, much tired by the journey, fell almost immediately into a sound sleep. They had reached London at noon, and it was quite dark when she awoke. The glimmering firelight showed her Mr. Baldwin's figure seated beside her bed, and she

awoke to the consciousness that he was looking at her with terrible intentness.

‘Are you quite rested, my darling?’ he said.

‘Quite.’

She answered only one word. The time had come, and she was afraid, though still no shadow from the brooding wings of the terrific truth swept across her soul. He kissed her on the forehead, and rose. Then he said,

‘Come down as quickly as you can. I asked Dugdale and Mr. Meredith to meet us in London, and they are here.’

CHAPTER VII.

THE MARRIAGE.

A SILENT party was assembled in the large old-fashioned room in which Margaret's presence was awaited. On the high mantel clusters of tall wax-candles were grouped, which failed to light the dusky apartment half-way along its length or across its breadth, but threw their lustre around the hearth, covered with a Turkey rug.

Hayes Meredith leaned moodily against the fluted side of the grim black-marble chimneypiece, with one foot on the brass fender, and his keen dark glance turned towards the glowing red fire. James Dug-

dale sat in a heavy arm-chair, his head leaning back against the red-leather cushion, his long thin fingers grasping the sides of the chair, his face, always pale, now of an ashen - gray colour, and the nervous tremor which pervaded his entire frame painfully evident to the two stronger men. Mr. Baldwin paced the room with folded arms. All three were silent. They had said all that was to be said in the absence of her whom their consultation concerned so deeply.

A light tread in the passage outside the door caught Mr. Baldwin's strained ear. James Dugdale heard it too, but he did not move ; he only closed his eyes, and passed his hand across his brow. In another moment Margaret was in the room, was within the luminous circle made by the light, and had advanced towards Meredith. Her face was deadly pale, but her

eyes were bright, and the old look of resolution which he had so often remarked and admired struck him once more, with his first glance at her. Her figure was as slight and girlish as when he had seen her last, the principal change was in the rich dress, now become habitual to her.

Hayes Meredith tried hard to make his earnest greeting as gladsome as it might have been; to say, ‘I told you we should meet again—you see I was a true prophet;’ but there was something in her face which made it quite impossible. She shook hands with him, and then she turned to James, who had now stood up, and laid her hand upon his shoulder. Fitzwilliam Baldwin made no sign. The worst had come now, and he had very little strength to face it.

‘James,’ she said, ‘is my father dead?’

‘Good God, Margaret,’ he made answer, catching her hands in his, ‘no! What can

have put such an idea, such a fear, into your mind ? He is quite well.'

She kissed him on the cheek, and sat down, keeping her hand on his arm still, and, slightly turning her head towards Baldwin, said in a quiet voice,

' I know there is something wrong. My husband is concealing something from me ; he is right in having concealed it so far, for he is always right—' she paused for a moment to smile at him, and then Meredith did not know the face—he had never seen *that* look in it—' and he has asked you to meet us here and tell me what it is, because he cannot bear to tell me himself. Well, I will hear anything you have to tell me, if it is his wish'—again she paused and smiled at him—' but he is here, and well ; my father, and my child, and you'—she pressed James's arm with the hand that lay upon it—' are well ; what can there

be for me to fear so very much that my husband should dread to tell it to me himself ?'

She turned an earnest, imploring gaze on James, and saw the look he directed at Meredith. Baldwin stepped hastily towards her, but she stretched her hand out, and shrank away from him. The terrible truth was fast swooping down upon her now.

'It does not come from him,' she said breathlessly; 'it is the resurrection of the past—it is my old dread—it is bad news that *you* have brought'—her white face addressed itself to Meredith—'tell me what it is quickly, for God's sake ! I can bear to know it—I cannot bear the suspense.'

'I will tell you, my dear,' said Meredith ; and he left his place, and put his strong arm round her—the other two stood side by side at a little distance. 'It is bad news, but not very bad ; the trouble it

brings will soon be over, and no ill can ever come of it. Do you remember when we heard, one night when you were at my house, that Hungerford had been murdered ?'

She started, and said, 'Yes, yes.'

' You recollect the date ?'

' Perfectly.' Her voice was hardly audible.

' He did not meet that dreadful fate, Margaret. He did not die thus, or then.'

' Thank God !' she said. And then, in a bewildered way, she thought for a moment, and cried out, ' He is not dead ! He is not dead ! That is your news—your dreadful news !'

' No, my darling, no,' said Mr. Baldwin, coming to her side. ' It is not so bad as that. Thank God, your fears are so far beyond the truth. He is dead. We are not parted. No, no.'

‘No, no,’ continued Meredith, still holding her; ‘it is not so bad as that. Hungerford is dead; I saw his body, and I gave it decent burial; but he did not die until long after the time when you believed him dead.’

‘When did he die?’ she asked. The relief was immense; but if the news she was to hear was only *that*, it was rather good than bad. ‘When *did* he die?’

Meredith hesitated. Baldwin turned away.

‘Tell me,’ she insisted.

‘He died only a short time ago,’ said Meredith slowly. ‘He died only a few days before I left Melbourne.’

She was still standing, upheld by his arm, but she lost consciousness for a little as she stood. He placed her gently in a chair, and they kept aloof from her, until her eyes opened, and she drew a long

breath. Then she lifted her hand to her forehead, and slowly pushed the hair away from it.

‘ You are better now ?’ said James.

‘ I am quite well,’ she said. ‘ Let me understand this. I don’t quite take it in.’

‘ It is better that she should understand all about it at once, Baldwin,’ said Meredith. ‘ The shock is over now, and time must not be lost. The only difference this unfortunate affair will make to you, my dear, is that you must be married over again.’

He spoke the words with extreme reluctance, and Margaret’s face crimsoned.

‘ What,’ she exclaimed, ‘ do you mean ?’ And then she said gently, ‘ Ah—yes—I see—I understand,’ and covering her face with her hands she burst into tears.

Mr. Baldwin knelt down by her chair,

and gently drew one hand from before her eyes.

‘I think you had better leave her with me now for a little while,’ he said.

The two men went silently away.

All through the hours of the wintry night, Margaret strove with the anguish that had come on her as bravely as she had striven against that which had turned her youth to bitterness. But she strove now with a different kind of strength, and she had consolation then denied to her. Yet even in that consolation there was more sorrow. In the past she had stood alone, her grief was hers only, her misery troubled no one’s peace, or she did not realise that it had any outside influence ; she had to fight the battle all alone, in patience, in endurance, in defiance, no softening influence, no gentle thoughts and blessed hopes to ham-

per or to aid her. The hard material conflict of life had been hers, and in her heart the sting of cruel mortification, of bitter disappointment, disgust, and scorn.

But she had borne this all alone, and had been able to bear it, had come through it somehow, and, if severely wounded, had hidden her wounds, now healed by the balm of love and happiness. But in this sorrow she did not stand alone ; she had the additional misery that it had brought grief upon the man who had changed her whole life into gladness, him to whom she owed all, and more than realised every dim misgiving she had ever felt when the idea of a second marriage presented itself.

She had seen Meredith and Dugdale again, after her long interview with Mr. Baldwin had come to an end—an interview full of exquisite pain to both, and yet stored among the most precious memories

of their lives—and had learned all the particulars of the plan of action upon which they had decided. Then she had requested that she might be left quite alone, until her presence should be necessary in the morning. During this trying time Margaret had successfully maintained her composure, and when she left them the three men remained silent for several minutes, under the impression produced by her calmness, good sense, and self-control. Meredith was the first to break the silence.

‘How wonderfully she has borne it!’ he said. ‘I never hoped she would have taken it like that, though I have seen her in great trouble before, and ought to have known what she could do and bear when the screw was put on her.’

‘I have never seen her in any trouble until now,’ said Mr. Baldwin—there was a strange kind of pain to him in this first

association with the man who had seen and helped Margaret in the time now again linked so mysteriously to the present—‘she does, indeed, bear this wonderfully.’

‘I doubt whether any of us—whether even *you*—can tell what it is to her,’ said James, and there was a little impatience in his tone.

Who could really know what she suffered but he—he, dowered with the power of feeling and understanding grief as these two men, so different, and yet in some qualities of their organisation so alike, were not dowered?

The exceptional circumstances had broken down the ordinary barriers which would have shut out the subject, and the three talked over the history of Margaret’s life in Australia fully and freely. Hayes Meredith told the others all he knew, and from his narrative Mr. Baldwin learnt how

tolerantly, how mercifully, Margaret had dealt with the wretched man who had made her youth so miserable, and how, while telling him the simple terrible truth as she saw it, there was much she had not seen, had failed to understand. And, as he listened to the story, and thought how the ghost of the horrid past had risen up again to blight her, he felt as if all the love with which he had loved her were nothing in comparison with that which filled his heart now ; and he grieved purely, unselfishly, for her, as she was then grieving for him.

Margaret had taken her child into her room. The nurse, weary of the journey, was nothing loth to be rid of her charge, and being an honest, stupid, bovine sort of person, and therefore admirably suited to her functions, she did not trouble her mind about her mistress's movements or

remark her appearance. The little girl, already strikingly like her mother, now slept tranquilly in Margaret's arms, and now, when in the restlessness of mental suffering she could not sit still, but walked about the room, in a deep chair before the fire.

As the night wore on, Margaret would kneel beside the chair, and look at the child by the fire-light, and then stand up again, and resume her wandering up and down. Surely the dawn was very long in coming. She lived through those hours as probably every one in every kind of suffering lives through certain supreme hours of that experience ; in alternate paroxysms of acute anguish, spells of quiet concentrated thought, and lapses of dull pain, in which there is a kind of confused forgetfulness, wanting little of being quite a blank. When the latter came, she would

rock the child upon her knees before the fire, or stand idly at the window, the curtain held back in her hand, and her face pressed against the cold damp panes.

Memory formed a rack on which she was stretched, until her powers of endurance were almost exhausted, and when the release came, it was accompanied by the stupor which follows terrible physical pain. Every circumstance of her past life, every pain in it, from the fiercest pang to the most ignominious little insult, came up to her, and gave her a deliberate wrench, and above all, the sense of loneliness in all this, contradictory though such a feeling was to the general tenor of her thoughts, oppressed her. No one could share that trouble with her which came from the past—therein she must suffer alone.

Then she would force herself to think of the dead man, and what he had suffered;

to realise that he had actually been living, and her husband, while she was on her voyage to England, while she was living her peaceful life at Chayleigh, while—and at this point in her thoughts she shuddered, and a deadly coldness laid hold upon her—while she had loved and married another man, had filled a high position, and enjoyed all that wealth, station, and consideration could give her. The full horror of her position swept over her then, and afterwards came the deadness, the confusion, the vain helpless weeping over her child, the natural shrinking from what the morrow was to bring, the strange wondering sense of a totally false position, of an utterly new and disturbing element in her life, making all that had gone before seem unreal.

The hardest of all was to know, to make herself believe practically, that she, bearing Fitzwilliam Baldwin's name—she, the mo-

ther of his child—was not his wife. She knew how innocently, how unconsciously, she had done this wrong; they had made it plain to her how small its importance really was; but she was oppressed with a sense of shame and anguish in reference to it, almost intolerable, even when she did not turn her thoughts towards her child.

When she did not! That was seldom, indeed; for, underlying all the rest, there was the agony of the wrong her child had sustained, never to be assuaged, and many times during that dreadful night she uttered aloud to the unconscious infant some of the burden of her soul. The injury to her child, the possible touch of disgrace on the stainless story of Baldwin's life; he who, as she said to herself over and over again, had lived in unblemished honour before the world, he who never needed, never wished to hide thought, or word, or deed

of his, he who so loved her—these constituted the almost unbearable agony of the grief which had come upon her.

They had told her whence the remedy for all this evil was to be looked for. If the child to be born three months hence should prove to be a son, the wrong would be righted; little Gerty would be no worse than if this had never happened, for it was not in any reason to be feared that the secret should ever transpire.

‘And if my child should not be a son?’ she had asked them simply.

‘Then there would be two to share Baldwin’s savings, and the unentailed property,’ Hayes Meredith had answered her, ‘and you would have to wait till the son and heir really did arrive.’

She had said no more then, and now, as she mused over all that had been said, a passionate prayer arose in her heart, that

the child for whose birth she now hoped, with feelings so widely, so sadly different from what they had been, might be a son. If it were so, Baldwin would be satisfied; the sting would be taken out of this calamity for him, though for her it never could be.

James Dugdale was right in the estimate he had formed of her feelings, little as she supposed that they were within any human ken. She did love little Gertrude wonderfully ; and to know her to be illegitimate, to know that she must owe her name and place in the world to a concealment, a false pretence, was a wound in the mother's heart never to be healed, and whose aching was never to be allayed.

So the hours wore away, and with their wearing there came to Margaret an increased sense of unreality. The ground she had trodden so securely was mined and

shaken beneath her feet, and with the stability all the sweetness of her life had also passed away. In her thoughts she tried to avoid the keen remembrance of that beautiful, pure summertime of love and joy, over which this shadow had fallen, but she could not keep away from it; its twilight had too newly come. With keen intolerable swiftness and clearness a thousand memories of her beautiful, stately home came to haunt her, like forms of the dead, and it was all in vain that she strove to believe, with the friends who had endeavoured to cheer and console her, that the black shadow which had fallen between that home and her could ever be lifted more.

When the wintry dawn had fully come, she lay down on her bed, with her child in her arms, and slept. One tiny infant hand was doubled up against the mother's

neck and her tear-stained cheek rested on the soft brown curls of the baby's hair.

Margaret's slumber did not last long. She awoke long before the time at which she had told Baldwin she would be ready. When she drew back the curtains and let in the cold gleaming light, there was as yet but little stir or noise in the street, and the shops opposite the hotel were but slowly struggling into their full-dressed and business-like appearance. She turned from the window, and looked at her face in the glass. Was that face the same that had looked out at her only this time yesterday? She could hardly believe it was, so ghastly, so worn, so old it showed now. She turned away abruptly, and took off her dress, which she replaced by a dressing-gown, and shook down her rich hair about her neck and shoulders. Presently the child awoke and cried, and Margaret car-

ried her to her nurse. She did not kiss the child, or look at her, after she had placed her in the woman's arms, but went away at once, with her teeth set.

How horrible, how unnatural, how shameful it seemed to Margaret, as she dressed herself in the plainest garments her travelling trunks supplied, that this should be her wedding-day, and she was dressing for her marriage ! All the painful feelings which she had experienced were concentrated and expressed in those terrible, almost incredible words. She went through her unaided task steadily, only avoiding seeing her face in the glass; and when it was quite done, when her shawl, and bonnet, and gloves were on, she knelt down by her bed, with her face upon the coverlet, and her clasped hands outstretched, and there she prayed and waited.

At nine o'clock James Dugdale knocked

at the door of Margaret's room. She opened the door at his summons, and silently gave him her hand.

'Baldwin is in the sitting-room,' he said. 'I see you are quite ready. Are you feeling strong?'

'I am perfectly well,' she replied.

They went downstairs, and into the room which the party had occupied on the preceding evening. Preparations for breakfast were in active progress, and two waiters were conducting them with as much fuss and display of alacrity as possible.

Hayes Meredith greeted Margaret with a cheerful aspect. Mr. Baldwin merely set a chair for her. Their 'good-morrow' was but a look, and what a pang this caused Margaret! The servants were not to know they had not met till then.

To the practical, business-like mind of Hayes Meredith the painful matter on hand

had not, indeed, ceased to be painful, but had advanced so far towards a happy termination, which should end its embarrassment positively, and in all human probability its danger, that he felt able to be cheerful without much effort or affectation, and took upon himself the task of keeping up appearances, to which his companions were much less equal. He really ate his breakfast, while the other three made the poorest pretence of doing so, and he did the talking about an early shopping expedition which had been proposed over night.

At length this portion of the trial came to an end in its turn, and Margaret, accompanied by James, and followed by Meredith and Baldwin, left the hotel on foot. The two waiters witnessed the departure of the party.

‘A precious glum lot for a party wot

is wisitin' the metrop'lis, eh, William? said one to the other.

'Ain't they just, Jim! They are swells though, from wot I hear.'

When they reached Piccadilly Meredith procured a hackney-coach, and the silent little company were driven to the City. Margaret sat back, leaning her head in the corner with closed eyes. The three men hardly spoke. The way seemed very long, and yet when the coach stopped, in obedience to Meredith's directions to the driver, in a crooked, narrow, dirty little street, which she had a confused notion was near the great river, Margaret started, and her heart, which had lain like a lump of lead in her breast, began to beat violently.

A few minutes' walking, but by a tortuous way, brought them to a shabby little old church, damp, mouldy, and of disused aspect, and into the presence of a clergy-

man whose appearance matched admirably with that of the building, for he, too, was shabby, little, and old, and looked as if he were mouldered by time and seclusion. An ancient clerk, who apparently combined the clerky office with those of the pew-opener and the verger, was the only other person present. Not even a stray boy, not even a servant-girl out on an errand, or a nurse-maid airing her charges in the damp, had been tempted, by the rare spectacle of an open church-door, to enter the building.

A little whispered conversation with the shabby little old clergyman, a paper shown by Meredith, and a ghost-like beckoning by the clerk, with intent to marshal the wedding-party to their places, and all was ready. The words of the solemn marriage service, which it was so dreadful to those two to repeat, which they had spoken once with such joyful hearts, were said for the

second time, and nothing but the signing of the register remained to be done.

As Mr. Baldwin with his wife followed the shabby little old clergyman into the vestry, he whispered to Margaret,

‘It is all over now, dearest; nothing can ever trouble or part us more but death.’

She pressed the arm on which she was leaning very close to her breast, but she answered him never a word.

‘Sign your name here, if you please, madam,’ said the clerk, putting a dirty withered old finger on the blank space in the large book which held in such trite record so many first chapters of human histories.

Mr. Baldwin had already signed, and was looking at his wife with eager attention. He saw the spasm of agony which crossed her face as she wrote ‘Margaret Hungerford.’ James Dugdale saw it too.

When Meredith and Dugdale in their turn had signed the register, and Mr. Baldwin had astonished the clergyman, to a degree unprecedented in his mild and mouldy existence, by the magnificence of the sum with which he rewarded his services, all was done, and the wedding-party left the church. Mr. Baldwin and Margaret got into the coach, and were driven to a shop in Piccadilly. There the driver, who was rather surprised at the novelty of a bridal pair being ‘dropped’ at a shop instead of being taken home in orthodox style to breakfast, was dismissed. Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin returned to the hotel, as they had left it, on foot.

‘Let me see—what’s the name of the church and the parson?’ said Hayes Meredith to James Dugdale, as they stood in the street when the coach had taken Bald-

win and Margaret away, and the church-door was shut upon them.

He had an old-fashioned red morocco-leather pocket-book, with a complicated clasp, composed of brass wire, open in his hand, and he carefully noted down James's reply, heading the memorandum with the initials,

F. M. B.

M. H.

'What do you write that down for?' James asked him.

'Partly from habit, old fellow, and partly because I never was concerned in so strange an affair before, and I have a fancy for reminding myself of it.'

He had put up the pocket-book as he spoke, and they were walking slowly away.

'I remember well,' said Meredith, 'when I said good-bye to her on board the Boomerang, I wondered what sort of fate awaited

her in England. It is a very enviable one on the whole, in spite of this little cloud, which I look upon as quite blown over. It might have been an ugly business if that poor wretch had pulled through in the hospital. What a comfort that it has all been so capitally managed, isn't it ?'

' Yes,' said James absently; ' how very, very miserable she looked !'

' Never mind that—it was natural—it was all so awkward you know. Why, now that it is over, I can hardly believe it. But she will be all right to-morrow—the journey had something to do with her looks, you must remember.'

When they reached the hotel they found Mr. Baldwin alone in the sitting-room. Hayes Meredith had recovered his spirits much more than any of the party. He was quite chatty, and inclined to enjoy himself, now that it was possible, in the

delightful novelty of London. Besides, he judged wisely that the less difference the event of the morning should be allowed to make in the disposition of the day the better.

Mr. Baldwin was ready to devote himself to his guest's pleasure, and a pleasant programme was soon made out. On reference being made to Margaret she said she would remain at home all day, with the child. James, too, pleaded fatigue, and did not leave the house. And when the other two were gone he thought, 'No one, not even *he*, knows what this is to her so well as I know it.'

CHAPTER VIII.

SHADOWS.

On the third day after the quiet marriage ceremony had been performed in the City church, Margaret Baldwin, her husband, and their child left London for Chayleigh. She had been told that her father knew nothing of the revelation which it had been Hayes Meredith's difficult task to impart to her, and she felt that she owed much to the wise consideration which had concealed it. In the first place, to have enlightened her father would only have been to inflict unnecessary pain upon him, and in the second, it would have embarrassed her extremely.

To keep her feelings in this supreme hour of her fate as much to herself as possible was her great desire, and especially as regarded her father. His pride and delight in the good fortune which had befallen her were so great, his absolute oblivion of the past was so complete and so satisfactory, that she would not, if even it could have made things better rather than worse for her, have had the one feeling disturbed, or the other altered. He had never mentioned her first husband's name to her, and she would not, to spare herself any suffering, have had an occasion arise in which it must needs be mentioned. So, as they travelled towards her old home, there was nothing in the prospect of her meeting with her father to disturb her, and the events of the week she had just gone through, began to seem already distant.

After the day of the marriage, Baldwin had not spoken of the grief that had befallen them. If it had been possible for him to love her better, more tenderly, more entirely, more deferentially than before, he would have done so; but it was not possible. In all conceivable respects their union was perfect; not even sorrow could draw them more closely together. Neither could sorrow part them, as sometimes it does part, almost imperceptibly, but yet surely, those whose mutual affection is not solidified by perfect similarity of temperament.

The gravity of Margaret's character, which had been increased by the experiences of her life, by the deadly influences which had tarnished her youth, had been much tempered of late by the cordial cheerfulness, the unfailing sweetness of disposition which characterised Baldwin, and

which, being entirely free from the least tinge of levity, harmonised perfectly with her sensitiveness. So, in this grief, they felt alike, and while he comprehended, in its innermost depths and intricacy of feeling, the distress she suffered, he comprehended also that she needed no assurance of his appreciation and sympathy.

The details of business and the arrangements for the future which the terrible discovery had made necessary were imparted to her by Hayes Meredith, and never discussed between her and Baldwin. She understood that in the wildly improbable—indeed, as far as human ken could penetrate, impossible — contingency that the truth should ever become known, the little Gertrude's future was to be made secure, by special precautions taken with that intent by her father. Thus no material anxiety oppressed her for the sake of the child,

over whom, nevertheless, she grieved with a persistent intensity which would have seemed ominous and alarming to any one aware of it. But that no one knew; the infant was the sole and unconscious witness of the mother's suffering.

What intense shame and misery, what incoherent passionate tenderness, what vague but haunting dread, what foreshadowing of possible evil had possession of her soul, as, her head bent down over the little girl sleeping in her arms, Margaret approached her father's house!

Mr. Carteret was standing at the entrance, and behind him, in the shade of the portico, was a figure whom Margaret did not recognise, and whom she was about to pass, having received her father's affectionate greeting, when Mr. Baldwin said, ‘This is Mr. Meredith’s son, Margaret,’ and Robert held out his hand. Then she spoke to the

boy, but hastily, being anxious to get her child and her father out of the cold air.

When the whole party had entered the house, and Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Carteret were talking by the fire in the study, Robert Meredith stood still in the hall watching the light snow flakes which had begun to fall sparingly, and which had the charm of novelty to him, and thinking not over-pleasantly of Margaret.

‘A proud, stuck-up fine lady,’ the boy muttered, and the expression of scorn which made his face so evil at times came over it. ‘I suppose she thinks I don’t remember her in her shabby old clothes, and with her hands all rough. I suppose she fancies I was too much of a child to know all about her when she used to do our needlework, and my mother used to puzzle her head to make out jobs for her, because she was too proud to take the money as a present. I

saw it all, though they didn't tell me; and I wonder how she would like me to tell her fine husband or her old fool of a father all about it! I remember how they talked about her at home when the black fellows killed Mr. Hungerford, and my father said they might venture to take her into the house now, until she could be sent to England. And my lady's too fine to look at one now, is she, with her precious self and her precious brat wrapped up in velvet and fur.' And the boy pulled off a chair in the hall a mantle of Margaret's which had been thrown there, and kicked it into a corner.

It would be difficult to do justice to the vile expression of his handsome face, as, having given vent to this ebullition of senseless rage, he again stood, looking through the side windows of the hall door for the approach of the carriage which was

to bring his father and James Dugdale to Chayleigh. The boy's chief characteristic was an extreme and besetting egotism, which Margaret had unconsciously offended. She would not have thought much or perhaps at all of the fact had she known it, but from the moment when, with a polite but careless greeting to Robert Meredith, she had passed on into the house, she had an enemy in the son of her old friend.

'I thought Margaret would be in a hurry home,' said the unconscious Mr. Carteret, in a sagacious tone to his son-in-law, 'when Meredith came. She received much kindness from him, and I knew she would like to acknowledge it as soon as possible.'

'And I, too, sir,' said Baldwin. 'What a good fellow he is, and a fine hearty fellow! What do you think of the boy?'

'A very fair kind of boy indeed,' said

Mr. Carteret, with unusual alacrity; ‘never requires to be told anything twice, and is never in the way. If he is noisy at all, he keeps it all for out of doors, I assure you. And not ignorant, by any means: gave me a very intelligible account of the habits of the wombat and the opossum. Really a very tolerable boy, Baldwin; I fancy you won’t mind him much.’

This was warm praise, and quite an enthusiastic supposition, for Mr. Carteret. Baldwin was much reassured by it; he and Margaret had been rather alarmed at the contemplation of his possible sufferings at finding himself alone with a real live boy. Baldwin was glad too of the excuse for talking about something apart from himself and Margaret. The most natural thing for him to say under the circumstances would have been, ‘Well, sir, and how do you think Margaret is looking?’ but he hesi-

tated about saying it, and was relieved when Mr. Carteret volunteered the opinion that she was looking very well, and began to question him about their doings in foreign parts.

Thus the time was whiled away until Meredith and Dugdale arrived, and Margaret, announcing that the child was asleep, came to sit with her father. A look from her husband showed her that all was well, and a look in return from her released him.

The evening passed away quietly. No incident of any moment occurred. Mr. Carteret displayed no curiosity about Meredith's business in London, though he was very congratulatory concerning the fortunate coincidence of the return of Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin, and very solicitous about the danger of James Dugdale's being made ill by the journey and the excitement of Lon-

don, which presented itself to Mr. Carteret in most alarming colours. He had not been in ‘town’ since Mrs. Carteret’s death, and if, contrary to his usual placid habit, he speculated about his own future at all, it certainly was to the effect that he hoped he never should be there again.

The old gentleman was in a state of supreme mental content just now. He was very happy in all respects, and the return of Margaret and Mr. Baldwin completed his felicity. His daughter’s account of her health was very satisfactory, and perhaps she need not go abroad again. They spoke of going on to the Deane if the weather should not prove very severe, and for his part he hoped they would do so. He had no great liking for foreign countries, and no strong faith in the remedial properties of their climate ; and though he was very glad that Margaret had tried Italy and pro-

fited by it, he should be still more glad that she should decide on staying at home. With a splendid home, every conceivable comfort, and improved health, she need not gad about any more, especially under present circumstances.

On the whole, Mr. Carteret's state of mind was one of enviable contentment on the evening of his daughter's return, and as she and her husband commented on it when they were alone, they felt that his entire unconsciousness was most fortunate. They had nothing to fear from suspicion or inquisitiveness on his part—he was incapable of the one, except in the case of a traveller reporting on newly-discovered natural objects, or of the latter, except in the case of birds, beasts, and creeping things.

There was one dissatisfied person among the little party at Chayleigh on the night

of the return. It was Robert Meredith. He had not succeeded in discovering the object of his father's visit to London. 'I am going to London with Mr. Dugdale, for a few days, on particular business,' his father had said to him before they went away. But he had not explained the nature of the business, and the boy was vexed by this reticence. He had quick, subtle perceptions, and he had detected some trouble in his father's mind before they left home, and during the voyage. He had a secret conviction that this visit to London, whose object Meredith, an open-mannered, unreserved man with every one, and always frank and hearty in his dealings with his children, had not explained, had reference to this undiscovered source of trouble.

Robert listened to all the conversation which took place during the evening, and closely watched the countenances of every

one present, but nothing transpired which shed the least light on the matter which excited his curiosity. He had not failed to remark that, though his father had told him all about his correspondence with Dugdale, and how he looked to him for advice and assistance in forwarding Robert's wishes, as to his education in England and his future career, the subject had not yet been discussed, and he had been left to amuse himself, and become familiar with the house and the surroundings, as best he might. A less shrewd and more amiable person than Robert Meredith would have imputed this to the pleasure of old friends in meeting after a separation of many years, and to the number and interest of the subjects they had to discuss. But Robert Meredith was not likely to entertain an hypothesis in which sentiment claimed a part, and was likely to resent anything which looked like

a postponement of his claims to those of any subject or interest whatsoever.

To baffle this youth's curiosity was to excite his anger and animosity—to make him determined that he *would* get to the bottom of the mystery sought to be concealed from him—to fill him with the belief that it must be evil in its nature, and its discovery profitable. It was to call out into active display all that was as yet worst in a nature whose capacity for evil Margaret had early detected, and concerning which his father had conceived many unspoken misgivings.

'It is almost as if he had come to England about these people's affairs, and not about mine,' said Robert Meredith to himself. 'I wonder how many more days are to be lost before I hear what is to be done about me.'

Margaret happened to glance towards him as this thought passed through his

mind, and the expression of his face struck her painfully. ‘He was a bad child as I remember him—a bad, sly, deceitful, heartless child—and he is a bad boy. He will be a bad man, I fear.’ She allowed these sentiments to influence her manner to Robert Meredith more than she was conscious of—it was polite indeed, but cold and distant.

It would have been depressing to a shy or sensitive person, but Robert Meredith was neither. He felt her manner indeed, and thought with a sneer, that considering the friendship she professed for his father, she might at least have feigned some interest in him. But he did not care. This rich woman, of high station and social importance, which his colonial notions rather magnified, must befriend him in material concerns, and, therefore, how she felt towards him was a thing of no consequence

whatever. She could not dislike him more than he disliked her, for he hated her and her fine husband. He remembered her poor, and almost at the mercy of his parents for daily bread, and now she was rich and independent of every one, and he hated her. How had she gained all the world had to give, all he had longed for, since in his childhood he had read and heard of the great world, and all its prizes and luxuries? Only by her beauty, only by a man's foolish love for her.

The boy's precocious mind dwelt upon this thought with peculiar bitterness and a kind of rage. He hated Baldwin, too, though with less of personal dislike than Margaret. He was the first man whom Robert Meredith had ever seen with whose wealth no idea of effort, of labour, of speculation, of uncertainty was associated, and the boy's ambition and his avarice alike

revolted against the contemplation of a position which he coveted with all the strength of his heart, and which he knew could never be his. This man, who passed him over as a mere boy—this man, who had given wealth and station to a woman whom Robert disliked and despised—was born to all these good things; he had not to long for them vainly, or to strive for them through long and weary toilsome years, with only the chance of winning them at last, which was to be his own lot in life. He might live as he listed, and the money he should have to spend would still be there.

Then there was a strife in the boy's mind between the burning desire for wealth, and the pleasures which wealth procures, and distaste to, revolt against, the toil by which it must be earned. In the evil soil of his nature such plants were ripe of growth,

and he rebelled blindly against the inevitable lot which awaited him. Only in the presence of Baldwin and Margaret, only in the innumerable trifling occurrences and allusions—all strange and striking to the colonial-bred boy—which mark the presence and the daily habits of persons to whom wealth is familiar, had Robert Meredith been brought to understand the distinction between his own position in life and that of persons of assured fortune. As he learned the lesson, he also learned to hate the unconscious teachers.

He learned, by the discussion of plans which he heard in the course of the evening, that his father intended to visit Mr. Baldwin at the Deane, and that he was to be of the party. The prospect gave him no pleasure. He should see this fine lady, then, in her grand home. If he dared, how he should like to say a few

things, in seeming innocent unconsciousness, which should remind her of the time when he had seen her in his father's house, and known far more about her than she or any one would have believed possible! The impulse to say something which should offend Mrs. Baldwin grew upon him; but he dared not yield to it, and his animosity increased towards the unconscious individual on whose account he was forced to impose restraint upon his spiteful and vicious nature.

Margaret retired early, and as she extended her hand to him with a kind 'good-night!' the diamonds which sparkled upon it caught his attention. Once more she marked the sinister look—half smile, half sneer—which came into his face. He was thinking, 'I wonder whether you would like Mr. Baldwin to know about the trumpery ring my mother sold for you, and how you

cried when you had to come to her afterwards, and tell her you had nothing left to sell.'

On the following day the weather was bright, dry, and cheerful; Meredith, Baldwin, and Robert went out early, bent on a long walk. During the forenoon Margaret did not come downstairs, but in the afternoon she went to her father's study in search of James. She found him there, a large folio was on a reading-desk before him, but it was long since he had turned a page.

'Put this with the letters for post,' she said, handing him a packet directed to Lady Davytry, 'and come out with me for a while.'

James looked at her anxiously. She had a wearied, exhausted expression in her face, and her cheeks were deeply flushed.

'You are very tired, Margaret?'

'Yes, I am. I am easily tired now, and I have been writing for hours.'

They went out together, and walked along the terrace into the flower-garden, which looked dreary in its desolate wintry condition. At first they talked vaguely of trifles, but after a while they fell into deep and earnest conversation, and Margaret leaned closely on James's arm as they walked, now quickly, now slowly, and sometimes she held him standing still, as she impressed upon him something that she was saying with emphasis.

The walk and the conference lasted long, and when at length the warning chill of sunset came, and James reminded Margaret of the danger of cold and fatigue, and she yielded to his counsel, and turned towards the house, traces of deep emotion were visible upon the faces of both.

'I will not speak thus to you again,'

said Margaret, as they reached the portico; ‘but I have implicit faith in your remembrance of what I have said, and in your promise.’

‘You may trust both,’ James answered her in an earnest but broken voice; ‘I will remember, and I will send for Rose Moore.’

‘I am delighted you have made up your mind not to return to Italy,’ said Mr. Carteret a day or two later. ‘So much travelling would be very unfit for you, and your son and heir ought certainly to be born at the Deane.’

CHAPTER IX.

FAMILY AFFAIRS.

THE eldest Miss Crofton was enthusiastically delighted when the intelligence of Mrs. Baldwin's unexpected return to Chayleigh reached her, which was on the morning after the event. It was very natural that she should like the importance which she acquired in the small but almost distressingly respectable circle of society in which she 'moved,' as the unaccountable phrase in use goes, from her position in regard to Mrs. Baldwin. To her the Willises, &c., looked for the latest intelligence concerning Margaret; to her the excellent, if rather too inexorably managing, wife of the rector

of the parish—a lady known to the population as ‘the Reverend Mrs. Carroll’— intrusted the task of procuring donations from Mr. Baldwin for a startling number of ‘charitable purposes,’ and through the discursive medium of her letters Haldane conducted his correspondence by proxy with his sister.

The eldest Miss Crofton entertained one supreme ambition. It was that she might become Margaret’s ‘particular friend,’ confidante, and, eventually, favourite sister-in-law. She had not as yet attained any of the degrees of the position to which she aspired, but that slight impediment by no means interfered with her assumption, for the edification of her friends and the general public, of the completed character.

She entertained considerable jealousy of Lady Davyntry, who was, she argued, in her frequent cogitations on this subject,

much older than Margaret, and ‘not a bit more’ her sister-in-law than she (Lucy Crofton) was destined to be at no distant time. She was particularly well pleased to learn that Lady Davystry had not accompanied her brother and his wife on their return to England, and promised herself, within five minutes of her having learned that Margaret was at Chayleigh, that she would make the most of the opportunity now open to her.

It was not altogether, it was indeed not much, from self-interest, or any mean variety of that pervading meanness, that the eldest Miss Crofton proposed to herself to be ‘great friends’ with Mrs. Baldwin; there was a good deal of real girlish enthusiasm about her, and it found a natural outlet in the direction of vehement admiration for the sister of her future husband,—admiration not disturbed by any percep-

tion or suspicion of her own inferiority. Such a suspicion was by no means likely to suggest itself to Lucy Crofton in connection with any one, especially at the present interesting and important epoch of her life —for she knew, as well as any young lady in England, how to *exploiter* the great fact of being ‘engaged.’

As for Margaret, she liked the pretty, lively, passably well-bred girl well enough for her own, and was resolved to like her better, and to befriend her in every possible way, for her brother’s, sake; but a missish intimacy of the kind which Lucy longed for was completely foreign to her tastes and habits. While Lucy Crofton pleased herself by commenting on the similarity between them in point of age, Margaret was trying to realise that such was actually the case, trying to realise that she had ever been young, putting a strong

constraint upon herself to turn her mind into the same groove as that in which the girl's mind ran. Between herself and all the thoughts, plans, hopes, and pleasures of girlhood lay a deep and wide gulf, not formed alone of the privileges and duties of her present position, not fashioned by her unusual gravity and strength of character, but the work of the past—an enduring monument of the terrible truths which had sent her of late a terrible memento.

Thus it happened that when Margaret received a note profusely underlined, and crowded with interjections, superlatives, all kinds of epistolary explosives from the eldest Miss Crofton, announcing her intention of coming a little later to pass a 'delightful long afternoon' with her darling friend, she experienced a sudden accession of weariness of spirit which communicated

itself to her aspect, and attracted the attention of her father, who immediately asked her if anything ailed her.

'Nothing whatever, papa,' replied Margaret ; and informed him after a minute or so that Lucy was coming to see her.

Provided Lucy did not come to Chayleigh accompanied by her wonderfully clever little brother, and did not pester him with questions intended to evince her lively interest in his collection, which, however, manifested much more clearly her profound ignorance of all its components, Mr. Carteret was perfectly indifferent to her movements. She did not interest him, but she was perfectly respectable, eligible, and, he understood, amiable ; and if she interested Haldane, that was quite enough for him. A simple sincerity, which never degenerated into rudeness, characterised Mr. Carteret ; and he perfectly understood

the distinction between saying what he did not think and leaving much that he did think unsaid—a useful branch of practical science, social and domestic. So he made no comment on Margaret's reply.

But Hayes Meredith, who had not yet seen Captain Carteret's future bride, was rather curious about her, and addressed a question concerning her to Margaret, which she, being in an absent mood, did not hear. Mr. Baldwin answered promptly and expansively, giving Lucy Crofton praise for good looks, good manners, good abilities, and good temper. The three men went on to talk of Haldane, his promotion, his general prospects, and the time fixed for his marriage, which was not to take place until the autumn. During this conversation Margaret rose from the breakfast-table, and stood thoughtfully beside the fire, and Robert Meredith employed himself

in listening to the talkers and watching her face.

‘Amiable creature!’ he thought—and the sneer which was strangely habitual to so young a face settled upon his lips as he thus mentally apostrophised her—‘you don’t care a pin for the girl; you are bored by her coming here, and she’s a long way prettier than ever you were, fine lady as you think yourself.’

Then, as Margaret looked up, with a bright flush on her face, with the air of one who suddenly remembers, or has something painful or embarrassing suggested by a passing remark, the boy thought—

‘I shouldn’t wonder if she’s jealous of this pretty girl, who has always been a lady, and knows nothing about the low life and ruffianism she could tell her of.’

Wide of the mark as were the speculations of the boy, in whose mind a dislike

of Margaret, strong in proportion to its causelessness, had taken root, he was not wrong in assigning the change in Margaret's expression from reverie to active painful thought to something in which Lucy Crofton was concerned.

She had been informed of her brother's plans ; but in the strangely combined distraction and concentration of her mind since her trouble had fallen upon her—trouble which each day was lightening for removing from her husband—she had almost forgotten them, she had never taken them into consideration as among the circumstances which she must influence, or which might influence her. The words which had roused her from her reverie reminded her she had something to do in this matter.

‘ Why is Haldane’s marriage put off till the summer ?’ she said.

'It is not put off,' said James. 'There never was any idea of its taking place sooner, that I know of;—was there, sir?'

'No,' said Mr. Carteret, 'I think not.—Indeed, Margery, I fancy it was so settled with a view to your being at home then. We did not think you would come home so soon, you know.'

'When is Haldane coming here, papa?'

'Very soon. Early next month he hopes to get leave.'

Margaret said no more, and the party shortly afterwards dispersed for their several morning avocations.

James Dugdale's attention had been caught by Margaret's look and manner when she spoke of her brother's marriage. He discerned something painful in her mind in reference to it, but he could not trace its nature, and he could not question her just then.

Margaret went to her room, and seated in her old place by the window—its floral framework bore no blossom now—thought out the subject which had come into her mind.

Miss Crofton arrived punctually, and found the drawing-room into which she was shown—very much against her will, for she would have preferred a tumultuous rush upstairs, and the entrée to the nursery region—occupied only by Robert Meredith. They had met during Hayes Meredith's expedition to London, and Lucy, though an engaged young lady, and therefore, of course, impervious to the temptations of coquetry, had perceived with quite sufficient distinctness that this ‘remarkably nice boy,’ as she afterwards called him, thought her very pretty, and found her rattling, rapid, girlish talk—which had the delight-

ful effect of setting him quite at his ease—very attractive.

Nothing could be more ridiculous, of course ; but then nothing was more common than for very young persons of the male sex (somehow, Miss Lucy avoided calling him a ‘boy’ in her thoughts) to ‘take a fancy’ to girls or women much older than themselves ; and in some not clearly-explained or distinctly-understood way, it was supposed to be very ‘safe’ for them to do so. She had no objection to the admiration even of so young an admirer as Robert Meredith, and she was pleased as well as amused by the candid and unequivocal pleasure which Robert manifested on seeing her. The youthful colonial did not suffer in the least from the disease of shyness, and was pleasantly unembarrassed in the presence of the eldest Miss Crofton.

The two had had time to talk over the unexpected return of Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin; and Miss Crofton, who was by no means deficient in perception, had had an opportunity of observing that her young admirer did not share her enthusiasm for Margaret, but was, on the contrary, distinctly cold and disdainful in the few remarks which he permitted himself to make concerning her, before Margaret made her appearance. When she did so, and Miss Crofton had started up and rapturously embraced her, that young lady and Robert Meredith alike remarked simultaneously that she was startlingly pale.

After a great many questions had been asked by Lucy and answered by Margaret, in whose manner there was an indefinable change which her friend felt very soon, and which puzzled her, Margaret took Miss Crofton upstairs for an inspection of little

Gertrude and the ‘thoroughly confidential’ talk for which Lucy declared herself irrepressibly eager.

‘If she knew—if she only knew—this pure, harmless creature,’ Margaret thought, with a pang of fierce pain as Lucy Crofton hugged the child and talked to her, and appealed to the nurse in support of her admiration, for which Gerty was poutingly ungrateful,—‘if she did but know how it has been with me since we last met, and how it is with my child !’

‘You are shivering, Margaret. You seem very cold. Let me poke the fire up before we settle ourselves. And now tell me all about yourself, how you really are ; of course one could not ask before that young Meredith. I want to see his father so much. By the bye, Haldane told me you knew him so well in Australia. You don’t look very well, I think, but you

are much stronger than when you went abroad.'

'I am much stronger,' said Margaret. 'But before I talk about myself, and I have a deal to tell you,'—Miss Crofton was delighted,—'I want to talk to you about yourself and Haldane.'

Miss Crofton was perfectly willing to enter on so congenial a subject, and she told Margaret all about the arrangements, which included many festive proceedings, to which the girl naturally attached pleasurable anticipations. When she had reached that portion of the programme which included the names and dresses of the bridesmaids, she stopped abruptly, and said with some embarrassment :

'Why do you look so grave, Margaret? —is anything wrong?' Then she added, before Margaret could speak, 'Ah, I know, you don't like a gay wedding; I remember

how quiet your own was ; but, you see, it would seem so odd if mine wasn't gay, and besides, I like it ; it's not the same, you know.'

'I know, dear,' Margaret said very gently, 'it is not at all the same thing, and I can quite understand your wishing to have a gay wedding. But I want you to listen to me, and to do what I am going to ask you. It is something in which you can do me a great service.'

This was delightful, this was being the 'great friend,' indeed this was very like being the favourite sister-in-law. So Lucy promptly knelt down by Margaret's chair, and putting her arm round her, assured her, with much emphasis, of her readiness to do anything she could for her pleasure.

There was a short pause, during which Margaret looked at the girl with a grave

sweet smile, and took her disengaged hand; then she spoke:

‘Haldane is coming here very soon, my father tells me. What leave has he got?’

‘A month.’

‘Now, Lucy, don’t be astonished, and don’t say no at once. I want you to be married during his leave, instead of waiting until the autumn.’

‘Margaret! Why?’ asked Lucy, in a tone which fully expressed all the surprise she had been requested not to feel.

‘I will tell you, Lucy. In a short time I am likely to have another baby. You did not know that, at least you did not know it was to be so soon; and I am very, very anxious—so anxious, that if I cannot have my own way in this it will be very bad ~~for~~ me—that your marriage should be over before a time comes when I may

be very ill—you know I was very ill indeed after Gerty's birth.'

'I know,' said Lucy, still with the surprised look.

'And I feel sure, dear Lucy, that if you are not married until the summer I shall not be here.'

'Not be here, Margaret! You surely do not mean—'

'I mean nothing to frighten you, Lucy, but I do mean this. I have not been well lately, and I have been sent away as you know; I ought not to be here now, the doctors would say—but it cannot be helped; we were obliged to come to England, and I may be sent away again, and not be able to go to your wedding. In short, Lucy,' and here Mrs. Baldwin lost her composure, 'I have set my heart on this. Will you make the sacrifice for me? will you put up with a much quieter wedding, and go

and spend your honeymoon at our villa at Naples ?”

‘I don’t know what to think,’ said Lucy; ‘I would do anything you liked, but it does not quite depend upon me; there’s papa and mamma, and Haldane, you know.’

‘I fancy Haldane will not object to your marriage being hurried a little,’ said Margaret, with a smile; ‘and I have generally understood that Miss Lucy Crofton contrives to get her own way with papa and mamma.’

Margaret was very unlikely to remember her own importance out of season; but it was not unseasonable that she should think of it now, and feel comforted by the assurance that Mr. and Mrs. Crofton would probably yield to any very strongly urged wish of hers.

Lucy laughed a little—the imputation of power over anybody was not unpleasing

to this young lady, who, after a fashion which had not hitherto developed into unamiability, dearly loved her own way.

‘But Lady Davyntry is at Naples,’ she said in a tone which was very reassuring to Margaret, who felt that the chief question was virtually disposed of, and details only now remained to be mastered.

‘She is ; but I am going to ask her to come home, since I find I cannot return. We must go to the Deane soon, if you will only be good, and let things be arranged as I wish. I need not go until after your wedding; but my husband and I wish that the child should be born at the Deane.

‘Of course,’ assented Lucy, ‘and you want it to be a boy, don’t you, Margaret?’

‘Yes, we hope it may be a boy.’

‘Well, whether it is a boy or a girl, I must be its godmother. You will let that be a promise, won’t you ?’

A long conversation ensued, and Lucy bade Margaret farewell until the morrow, with a delightful consciousness that she had achieved the position she had so much desired.

Margaret told Mr. Baldwin her wish with regard to Haldane's marriage, and the steps she had taken towards its fulfilment. He found no fault with it, but failed to comprehend her reasons.

'I can understand your dislike of the kind of wedding the Croftons would have been likely to institute,' he said; 'but you might have escaped it on the plea of your health.'

'No,' she replied, 'I could not do that—I could not hurt the feelings of all these good people, and I could not endure the wedding. Even as it will be now, think how painful it must be to me.'

Her husband understood all those sim-

ple words implied, but he passed them over unnoticed. It grieved him inexpressibly to observe that Margaret had not shaken off the impression of the occurrence from which his own happy, hopeful nature had rallied so much more quickly.

'I know, my darling, I know—and, indeed, I ought not to have asked you for a reason, because you are the least fanciful of women—it would be true masculine logic to refuse to aid you in one fancy, but I am not going to be logical after that fashion. I will write to Haldane, and get everything settled.'

Accordingly, everything was settled. Mr. Carteret was acquiescent as usual, and with his customary politeness congratulated himself on the presence of Mr. Meredith and his son on so interesting an occasion. The Croftons were benignant. Dear Mrs. Baldwin had made such a point of their

daughter's profiting by her villa at Naples, and had set her heart so completely on the matter, and, of course, dear Mrs. Baldwin must just now be considered in everything. Haldane was delighted, and all went well.

' Margaret,' said James Dugdale, when all had been arranged, ' why is this fixed idea always present with you ? Can you not shake it off ? Ever since you came home I have been watching you, and hoping that you were yielding to the influence of time ; but I see now, since you have set yourself to arrange Haldane's marriage, that this is a vain hope. Why is it, Margaret ?'

' You ask me why it is ?' she replied. ' You—can you say it is not in your own mind also ? Can you say that you ever really believed that I could get over the thing that has befallen me ? You may call it superstition, and no doubt it is so. I

fancy such a youth as mine is fruitful ground for the sowing and the nurture of superstition, if such be the sense of doom, of an inevitable fate hanging over me ; but it is stronger than I, and you know I am not generally weak, James. It is always there,—always before me—I can see nothing else, think of nothing else.'

' I know, dear, I know ; but when your health is stronger—believe me, Margaret, I do not wish to mock you with an assurance that you can ever quite get over what has happened—when your child, the son and heir, is born, you will be better ; you will wonder at yourself that you allowed such sway to these dark forebodings. Think of all you have to make you happy, Margaret, and don't, don't yield to the presentiment which is due to your health alone.'

She laid her hand on his arm with a smile.

‘Supposing it be so, James; supposing all I think and feel—all the horrors which come to me in the night-watches, all the memories perfectly distinct in their pain, whereas I could not recall an hour of the brief happiness I ever knew in my days of delusion—supposing all this to be a mere groundless state of suffering, and *you* know better’—here her clear gray eyes looked at him with an expression of ineffable trust and compassion—‘what harm have I done? *If I live*, this marriage may as well be over; and *if I die*, I have spared my husband and my father one sharp pang, at any rate. Haldane would be very sorry, but he would want to be married all the same, and it would be hard upon Fitzwilliam and my father.’

‘And me?’ he asked her, as if the question were wrung from him by an irresistible impulse of suffering.

Her hand still lay upon his shoulder, and her clear gray eyes, which deepened and darkened as she slowly spoke, still looked steadily into his.

‘And *you*, James. No, I have no power to save you a pang more or less; it would not make any difference *to you*.’

There was a strange cruel satisfaction to him in her words. It was something, nay, it was very much, that she should know and acknowledge that with her all that had vital interest for him began and ended, that the gift of his heart, pure, generous, disinterested, was understood and accepted. There was silence between them for some time, and then they talked of more general subjects, and just before their interview came to an end their talk turned upon little Gertrude.

‘You will always love her best, James; both my children will be dear to you,’ said

Margaret; ‘but you will always love her whom her mother unconsciously wronged best.’

Lady Davyntry made her appearance at Davyntry in due season, and the set of Neapolitan coral, which she brought as her contribution to the worldly goods of the bride, was so magnificent, that Lucy could not find it in her heart to cherish any such unpleasant sentiment as jealousy against Eleanor, and determined that the ‘great friend’s’ scheme should extend to her also.

The return of her sister-in-law was a great pleasure, but also a great trial for Margaret. Her presence renewed painfully the scene of secret humiliation, of severance from those who had nothing to hide, from which she had already suffered so much; and the phantoms of the past came forth and swarmed about her, as Eleanor over-

whelmed her with caresses, and declared her delight at being once more with her, and her vivid perception of the improvement in ‘baby.’

The most unsuspicious and unexacting of women, Eleanor Davytry had been so perfectly satisfied with the reasons assigned by her brother for his return to England, that it never occurred to her to ask him a question on the subject. She was very eloquent concerning the beauty of the season at Naples, assured Haldane that she had left everything in perfect order for the reception of his bride, and wound up a long and animated monologue by informing Margaret that she had brought with her the unfinished portraits.

‘What a pity!’ interrupted Baldwin; ‘they may be injured, and surely you knew we intended to return.’

‘Yes, I did,’ said Eleanor, ‘but I thought

Mr. Carteret would like to see them as they are, and I never reflected that they might be injured.'

The few days which followed the arrival of Lady Davyntry were full of the confusion and discomfort which ordinarily precede a wedding, even on the quietest scale. The Merediths, father and son, had gone to Oxford, where Hayes Meredith had one or two old friends among the University authorities. They were not to return until the day before the wedding. Mr. Carteret was rather 'put out' by the inevitable atmosphere of fuss and preparation, and Margaret devoted herself as much as possible to him, passing in his study all the time she could subtract from the demands of the bride-elect and her brother. Mr. Baldwin was much with Lady Davyntry, and James Dugdale kept himself, after his fashion, as much as possible to himself.

On the day before that fixed for Haldane's marriage all the inmates of Chayleigh were assembled, and Lady Davystry was of the party. They had been talking cheerfully of the event anticipated on the morrow, and Eleanor had been expressing her fears that Mr. Carteret would feel very lonely after his son's departure—fears which that placid gentleman did by no means entertain on his own account—when Hayes Meredith and Robert arrived. The evening passed away rapidly, and the little party broke up early. Meredith joined Dugdale in his sitting-room, and the friends proceeded to the discussion of the business on which Hayes Meredith had come to England. With two exceptions they adhered strictly to this one matter. The first was of a trifling nature.

'Did you happen to see my pocket-book anywhere about?' Meredith asked.

'No,' said Dugdale; 'you mean your red-leather one, I suppose?'

'Yes.'

'I have not seen it, or heard of its being found in the house.'

'I must have lost it on our journey to Oxford, I suppose,' said Meredith. 'It's of no consequence; there was no money in it, and nobody but myself could understand the memoranda.'

The second exception was of a graver kind ; it, too, arose on Meredith's part.

'I am sorry to see Margaret looking so ill,' he said. 'I was very much struck by her looks this evening. Has she been looking so ill as this since I saw her last?'

'No,' replied James ; 'she has over-exerted herself lately, I fancy, and she has never gotten over the shock.'

'Has she not?' said Meredith quickly.
'That's a very bad job ; very likely to tell

against her, I should think. Isn't it rather weak of her, though, to dwell so much as to injure her health on a thing that is of so little real consequence, after all ?'

'I suppose it is,' said James; and he seemed unwilling to say more.

But the matter had evidently made an impression on Meredith, for he said again,

'I thought her looking very ill, feverish, and nervous, and quite unlike herself. Do you think Baldwin perceives it?'

'No,' said James shortly, 'I don't think he does. Margaret never complains.'

'Well, well, it will all be right when the heir to the Deane comes to put an end to uncertainty and fear, if she has any.'

And then he led the conversation to his own affairs.

'I like your friend so much, Madge,' said Lady Davytry to Mrs. Baldwin, as

the sisters-in-law were enjoying the customary dressing-room confabulation. ‘He is such a frank, hearty, good fellow, and not the least rough, or what we think of as “colonial” in his manners. What a pleasure it must have been to you to see him again!’

‘Yes,’ said Margaret absently.

‘How tired your voice sounds, darling! you are quite knocked up, I am afraid. You must go to bed at once, and try to be all right by to-morrow. I delight in the idea of a wedding; it is ages since I have been at one, except yours. What sort of a boy is Mr. Meredith’s son?’ she continued, in a discursive way to which she was rather prone; ‘he looks clever.’

‘He looks knowing,’ said Margaret, ‘more than clever, I think. I don’t like him.’

‘If she knew—if she, too, only knew,’

ran the changeless refrain of Margaret's thoughts when she was again alone, 'if she could but know what I have lived through since she saw me last! What a change has fallen on everything—what a deadly blight! How hard, and how utterly in vain I strive against this phantom which haunts me! If I had but listened to the warning which came to me when I found out first that he loved me, the warning which her words and the yearning of my own weak heart dispelled! If I had but heeded the secret inspiration which told me my past should never be taken into any honest, unsullied life! And yet, O my God, how happy, how wonderfully, fearfully happy I was for a while—for happiness is a fearful thing in this perishing world. Would I have heeded any warning that bade me renounce it? Could I have given him up, even for his own sake?'

She rose and paced the room in one of those keen but transient paroxysms of distress which, all unknown by any human being, were of frequent occurrence, and which had not quite subsided when her husband came into her dressing-room.

‘Margaret,’ he said to her gravely, when he had elicited from her an avowal of some of her feelings, ‘you are bringing this dead past into our life yourself, as no other power on earth could bring it. Do you remember when you promised to live for me only? Can you not keep your word? This is the trial of that faith you pledged to me. Is it failing you?’

‘No,’ she said, ‘no, it is not failing, and I can keep my word. But’—and she clasped her arms around his neck and burst into sudden tears—‘my child, my child!’

CHAPTER X.

MARGARET'S PRESENTIMENT.

THAT noun of multitude, ‘the neighbourhood,’ was at first disposed to take it very ill that the wedding of the eldest Miss Crofton should be despoiled of any of its contemplated gaiety and display, by what it was pleased to call the ‘airs which Mrs. Baldwin gave herself.’ It bethought itself of Margaret’s marriage, and arrived at the very probable conclusion that she was disposed to be a little jealous of her sister-in-law elect, and not disposed to allow her to ‘have a fuss made about her’ if she could help it.

Poor Mrs. Crofton found her explana-

tions and apologies coldly received ; which distressed her, for she was a slave to conventional observances, and visited and received visits with exasperating regularity, and Mrs. Baldwin's popularity declined. But not permanently ; when it was understood that her return to the Deane was desirable for a reason which every one understood, and whose force all recognised, opinions were modified, and general good-humour was restored.

The preparations for the wedding went on, and nothing was wanting to the cheerfulness and content of all concerned, except less inquietude regarding Margaret. They remembered afterwards that it happened so frequently that, when they came to think of it, they were amazed that the circumstance had not impressed them more deeply at the time : that when any two of the small party at Chayleigh met, one

would say to the other, ‘How ill Margaret looks to-day!’ or, ‘She is looking better to-day;’ or, ‘She seems hardly so well, I think;’ the phrases varying widely, but each conveying the fact that Margaret’s looks and health, Margaret’s spirits and general demeanour, were in some form or other the objects of general attention, and were altered from their ordinary condition.

Mr. Carteret’s solicitude about her was fitful, and easily tranquillised. He would question her anxiously enough when she came down to breakfast in the morning, and be so uneasy and unhappy if she did not come down, that, perceiving that circumstance, she was rarely absent from the breakfast-table. But when the day advanced, and Margaret began to look brighter, he would remark that she ‘had got some colour now, and looked quite herself again,’ and, with the inconsequence

which is frequently observable among persons who are constantly in the presence of even the most beloved objects, he failed to notice how often she required to 'look quite herself again,' in order to remove his transient uneasiness.

She looked very handsome at this time; handsomer than she had ever looked, even at the period when people had first found out that there was no great exaggeration in calling Mrs. Baldwin 'a beauty.' The broad brow, the sweet serious lips, which kept all their firmness, but had less severity than in the old time, the large sensible gray eyes, the delicate face, which had never had much colour, and now had permanently less, wore a spiritualised expression which made itself felt by those who never thought of analysing it.

Among the number were the Croftons, Hayes Meredith, and Lady Davystry. Mr.

Baldwin was not so blind. He saw that a change, which impressed him painfully, had come over the face and the spirit of the woman whom he loved more and more with every day of the union which had hitherto surpassed the hopes he had built upon it in happiness, and the only mistake he made was in believing that he quite understood that change, its origin, its nature, and its extent. He knew Margaret too well, had been too completely the confidant of her misgivings and hesitations previous to their marriage, and of the relief, the peace, the rehabilitation which had come to her since, to under-estimate the severity of the blow which had fallen upon her ; but there was one aspect of her trouble in which he had never regarded it, in which it was her earnest desire, her constant effort, that he should never see it.

He had no knowledge of the presenti-

ment under which Margaret laboured; he had never suspected her of such a weakness; and if it had been revealed to him, he would have unhesitatingly referred it to the condition of her health, have pronounced it a passing nervous affection, and dismissed it from his thoughts. He had never heard her express any of the vague, formless, but unconquerable apprehension with which she had learned the probability of Hayes Meredith's coming to England; he had no idea that a foregone conclusion in her mind lent the truth which had been revealed to her an additional power to wound and torture her, which was doing its work, unrecognised, before his eyes.

One of the most sympathetic, generous, unselfish of men, Fitzwilliam Baldwin united cheerfulness of disposition with good sense to a degree not so frequently attained as would be desirable in the interests of hu-

man nature ; and while he comprehended to the utmost the realities of the misfortune which had befallen Margaret, himself, and their child, he would have been slow to appreciate, had he been aware of its existence, the imaginary evil with which Margaret's morbid fancy had invested it. When this wedding, with all its painful associations—so painful for them both that they never spoke of the subject when they were alone—should be over, Margaret would be quite herself again ; and she would find so much to occupy and interest her at the Deane, she would be able to throw off the impressions of the past, and to welcome the new interest which was so soon to be lent to her life with nearly all the gladness it would have commanded had the incident they had to deplore never occurred.

He had a keen perception, though he did not care to examine its origin very

closely, that Margaret would find it a relief to be rid of the presence of Meredith and his son. They were associated with all that had been most painful, most humiliating, in the old life; they had brought the evil tidings which had cast a heavy gloom over the calm sunny happiness of the new, and she could not be happy or oblivious in their presence—could not, that is to say, at present, in her abnormal state of sensitiveness and nervousness.

Fitzwilliam Baldwin did not cordially like Robert Meredith. He felt that he did not understand the boy, and his frank nature involuntarily recoiled, with an unexplained antipathy, from contact with a disposition so *voilée*, so little open, so calculating, as his observation convinced him that of Robert Meredith was. Quite unselfish, and very simple in his habits and ideas, Mr. Baldwin was none the less apt

to discover the absence or the opposite of those qualities, and it was very shortly after their return to Chayleigh that he said to his wife,

‘Meredith intends to make a lawyer of his son, he tells me.’

‘Yes,’ said Margaret, ‘it is quite decided, I understand. I daresay he will do well, he has plenty of ability.’

‘He has, and a few other qualifications, such as cunning and coolness, and a grand faculty for taking care of himself, which people say are calculated to insure success in that line of life.’

‘You don’t like lawyers,’ said Margaret.

‘I don’t like Robert Meredith; do you?’ said her husband.

‘No,’ she replied promptly, ‘I do not; more than that, I ought to be ashamed of myself, I suppose, and yet I can’t contrive to be; but I dislike the boy extremely, more

than I could venture to tell; the feeling I have about him troubles me—it is difficult for me to hide it.'

'I don't think you do hide it, Margaret,' said Baldwin; 'I only know you did not hide it from me. I never saw you laboriously polite and attentive to any one before; your kindness to every one is genuine, as everything else about you, darling; but to this youngster you are not spontaneous by any means.'

'You are right,' she said, 'I am not. There is something hateful to me about him. I suppose I am afflicted with one of those feminine follies which I have always despised, and have taken an antipathy to the boy. Very wrong, and very ungrateful of me,' she added sorrowfully.

'Neither wrong nor ungrateful,' her husband answered in a tone of remonstrance. 'You are ready to do him all the

substantial benefit in your power, as I am, for his father's sake. There is no ingratitude in that, and as for your not liking him being wrong—'

'Ah, but I don't stop at *not* liking him,' said Margaret; 'if I did, my conscience would not reproach me as it does. I hope his father does not perceive anything in my manner.'

'Nothing more unlikely. Meredith does not observe you so closely or understand you so well as I do; and I don't think any one but myself could find out that you dislike the boy; and I was assisted, I must acknowledge, by a lively fellow-feeling. I should not wonder if Robert was perfectly aware that he is not a favourite with you.'

'I am sure there is nothing in my manner or that of any one else,' said Margaret, 'which in any way touches himself, that he fails to perceive.'

‘Fortunately it does not matter. He loses nothing material by our not happening to take a fancy to him, and I don’t think he is a person to suffer from any sentimental regrets. More than that, Margaret—and enough to have made me dislike him—I don’t think he likes you.’

‘Like me! He hates me,’ she said vehemently. ‘I catch his eye sometimes when he looks at me, and wonder how so young a face can express so much bad feeling. I have seen such a diabolical sneer upon his face sometimes, particularly when either my father or his father spoke affectionately to me, as almost startled me—for my own sake, I mean.’

‘For your own sake?’ said Mr. Baldwin in a tone of some annoyance. ‘How can you say such a foolish thing? Why on earth should you give such a thing a moment’s thought? What can it possibly mat-

ter to you that you are the object of an impertinent dislike to a boy like young Meredith?"

'Nothing indeed,' answered Margaret, 'and I will never think of it again. You are all in a conspiracy to spoil me, I think, and thus I am foolish enough to be surprised and uncomfortable when any one dislikes me without a reason.'

No more was said then on this subject, and Mr. Baldwin dismissed it from his mind. The conversation he had had with his wife had just so much effect upon him and no more, that he took very little notice of Robert, and displayed no more interest than politeness demanded in the discussions concerning him and his future, which just then shared the attention of the family party at Chayleigh with Captain Carteret's rapidly approaching marriage.

This circumstance the young gentleman was not slow to notice, and it had the effect of intensifying the feeling with which he regarded Margaret.

‘She has put her fine husband up to snubbing me, has she?’ he said to himself one day, when Mr. Baldwin had taken less notice of him than usual. ‘Now I wonder what *that’s* for. Perhaps she’s afraid of the goodness of my memory. I daresay she has told him a whole pack of lies about the time she was in Melbourne, and she’s afraid, if I walked or rode out with him, I might get upon the subject. And I only wish he would give me a chance, that’s all.’

But nothing was more unlikely than that Mr. Baldwin should give Robert Meredith such a ‘chance,’ and that the boy’s natural quickness soon made him understand. The only person with whom he

associated at this time, who afforded him any opportunity for his spiteful confidences, was the bride-elect.

Lucy was still pleased by the unrepressed admiration of the only male creature within the sphere of Mrs. Baldwin's influence who was wholly unimpressed by her attractions. The 'great friend's' project, though, according to Miss Lucy Crofton's somewhat shallow perceptions, triumphantly successful, did not in the least interfere with so thoroughly legitimate a development of feminine proclivities.

To be sure, the subject of Margaret's first marriage, and her disastrous life in Melbourne, was one which Lucy had never heard touched upon, even in the most intimate conversations among the family at Chayleigh. Her affianced Haldane had never spoken to her, except in the briefest and most general terms, of that painful

episode in the family history. But that did not constitute, according to Lucy's not very scrupulous or refined code of delicacy, any barrier to her talking and hearing as much about it in any other available manner as she could.

She even persuaded herself that it was her 'place' and a kind of 'duty' to learn as much about her future sister-in-law as possible; people would talk, and it was only proper and right, when certain subjects were introduced, that she, in her future capacity of Mrs. Haldane Carteret (the cards were printed, and very new, and shiny, and important they looked), should know exactly 'how things stood,' and what she should have to say. Which was a reflection full of foresight on the part of the eldest Miss Crofton, and partaking somewhat of the nature of prophecy, as, from the hour of Mrs. Baldwin's marriage, the subject of

her colonial life had never been revived in the coteries of 'the neighbourhood.'

Robert Meredith had method in his mischief. He did not offend the *amour propre* of Lucy by speaking contemptuously of Mrs. Baldwin, or betraying the dislike which he entertained towards her; he dexterously mingled in the revelations which he made to Lucy an affected compassion for Margaret's past sorrows, and a congratulatory compassion of her present enviable position, with artful insinuations of the incongruity between the Mrs. Baldwin of the present and the Mrs. Hungerford of the past, and a kind of bashful wonder, which he modestly imputed to his colonial ignorance of the ways of society, how any person could possibly consider Miss Lucy Crofton other than in every respect superior to Mrs. Baldwin.

The boyish flattery pleased Lucy's van-

ity, the boyish admiration pleased her, and she entirely deprecated the idea that Robert's manners and ideas were not on a par with those of other people born on this side of the ocean.

' You must remember,' she said with much coquetry, and a smile which she intended to be immensely knowing, ' that Mrs. Baldwin is a great lady in her way, and I am not of anything like so much importance. I fancy that would make as much difference in your part of the world as here.'

And then they talked a great deal of his part of the world; and Robert acknowledged that his most earnest desire was that he might never see Australia again. And Lucy Crofton confessed that she was very glad Haldane could not be sent *there*, at least on that odious 'foreign service,' which she thought a detestable and absurd in-

justice, devised for the purpose of making the wives and families of military men miserable. She was quite alive to the fact that they were highly ornamental, but could not see that soldiers were of the slightest use at home—and as to abroad, they never did anything there, since war had ceased, but die of fevers and all sorts of horrors. So the pair pursued an animated and congenial conversation, of which it is only necessary to record two sentences.

‘I suppose you have no one belonging to you in Australia?’ Robert Meredith asked Miss Crofton, in a tone which implied that to so exceptionally delightful a being nothing so objectionable as a colonial connection could possibly belong.

‘No one that I know anything about; there is a cousin of papa’s—much younger than papa, he is—who got into trouble, and

they sent him out there; but none of us ever saw him, and I don't know what has become of him. I don't even know his name rightly ; it is something like Oldham, or Otway, or Oakley.'

' How do you feel, Madge ? are you sure you are equal to this business ?' said Lady Davytry to Margaret, as she came into her sister-in-law's room on the morning of Haldane's marriage. ' Haldane is walking about the hall in the most horrid temper, your father is lingering over the last importation of bats, as if he were bidding them an eternal farewell, and the carriage is just coming round, so I thought I would come and look after you two. I felt sure you would be with the child. What a shame not to bring her to the wedding !— Isn't it, Gerty ?' and Lady Daventry, looking very handsome and stately in her brave

attire, took the little girl out of her mother's arms, and paused for a reply.

Margaret was quite ready. She was very well, she said, and felt quite equal to the wedding festivities.

'That's right ; I like weddings, when one isn't a principal ; they are very pleasant. How pale you are, Margaret ! Are you really quite well ?'

'She is really quite well,' said Mr. Baldwin ; 'don't worry her, Eleanor.'

The slightest look of surprise came into Eleanor's sweet-tempered face, but it passed away in a moment, and they all went down to the hall, where Margaret received many compliments from her father on her dress and appearance, and where Haldane on seeing them first assumed a foolish expression of countenance, which he wore permanently for the rest of the day.

The carriages were announced. Mar-

garet and her husband, Lady Davytry and Mr. Carteret, were to occupy one; the other was to convey Haldane, Hayes Mere-dith and his son, and James Dugdale.

‘Where is James?’ asked Mr. Carteret.
‘I have not seen him this morning.’

Nobody had seen him but Haldane, who explained that he had preferred walking on to the church.

‘Just like him,’ said Haldane, ‘he is such an odd fellow; only fancy his asking me to get him off appearing at breakfast. Could not stand it, he said, and was sure he would never be missed. Of course I said he must have his own way, though I couldn’t make him out. He could stand Margaret’s wedding well enough.’

The last day of Margaret’s stay at Chay-leigh had arrived. All arrangements had been made for the departure of Mr. and

Mrs. Baldwin and Mr. Carteret. An extraordinary event was about to take place in the life of the tranquil old gentleman. He was about to be separated from the collection for an indefinite period, and taken to the Deane, a place whose much-talked-of splendours he had never even experienced a desire to behold, having been perfectly comfortable in the knowledge that they existed and were enjoyed by his daughter.

That her father should be induced to accompany her to Scotland, that she should not be parted from him, had been so urgent a desire on Margaret's part, that her husband and James Dugdale had set themselves resolutely to obtain its realisation, and they had succeeded, with some difficulty. The collection was a great obstacle, but then Mr. Baldwin's collection—whose treasures the old gentleman politely and

sincerely declared his eagerness to inspect, while he secretly cherished a pleasing conviction that he should find them very inferior to those of his own—was a great inducement; besides, he had corresponded formerly with a certain Professor Bayly, of Glasgow, who had some brilliant theories connected with *Bos primus*, and this would be a favourable opportunity for seeing the Professor, who rarely ‘came South,’ as he called visiting England.

He was not at all disturbed by Margaret’s eager desire that he should accompany her; he did not perceive in it the contradiction to her usual unselfish consideration for others, which James Dugdale saw and thoroughly understood, and which Mr. Baldwin saw and did not understand, but set down to the general account of her ‘nervousness.’ He had been rather unhappy at first about the journey and the

change; but James's cheerful prognostications, and the unexpected discovery that Foster, his inseparable servant, whose displeasure was a calamity not to be lightly incurred, so far from objecting to the tremendous undertaking, 'took to' the notion of a visit to the Deane very kindly, was a relief which no false shame interfered to prevent; Mr. Carteret candidly admitting, and the whole family thankfully recognising.

'I don't know how I should have got through this day,' Margaret said to James, as they stood together on the terrace under the verandah, and she plucked a few of the tender young leaves which had begun to unfold, under the persuasion of the spring time—'I don't know how I should have got through this day, if papa had not agreed to come with us. It is bad enough as it is; a last day'—she was folding the tiny leaves

now, and putting them between the covers of her pocket-book—‘is always dreadful—dreadful to *me*, I mean. It sounds stupid and commonplace to talk of the uncertainty of life, but I don’t think other people live always under the presence of the remembrance, the conviction of it, as I do. It is always over me, and it makes everything which has anything of finality about it peculiarly impressive to me.’

Her hand was resting on his arm now, and they turned away from the house-front and walked down the grassy slope.

‘Do you—do you mean that this sense of uncertainty relates to yourself?’ he asked her, speaking with evident effort, and holding her arm more closely to him.

‘Yes,’ she replied calmly; ‘I am never tortured by any fears about those I love now; the time was when I was first very, very happy; when the wonderful, glorious

sense of the life that had opened to me came upon me fully; when I hardly dared to recognise it, because of the shadow of death. Then it hung over my husband and my child; over my father—and—you.'

He shook his head with an involuntary deprecatory movement, and a momentary flicker of pain disturbed his grave thoughtful eyes.

' And it lent an intensity which sometimes I could hardly bear to every hour of my life—my wonderfully happy life,' she repeated, and looked all around her in a loving solemn way which struck the listener to the heart. ' But then the thing I had dreaded, though I had never divined its form, though it had gradually faded from my mind, came upon me—you know how, James, and how rebellious I was under my trial; no one knows but God and you—and then, then the shadow was lightened.

It never has fallen again over them or you; it hangs only over me, and—James, look at me, don't turn away—I want to remember every look in your face to-day; it is not a shadow at all, but only a veil before the light whose glory I could not bear yet awhile. That is all, indeed.'

He did not speak, and she felt that a sharp thrill of pain ran through his spare form.

'Don't be angry with me,' she went on in soft pleading tones, 'don't think I distress you needlessly, I do so want you to hear me—to leave what I am saying to you in your mind. When I first told you that I had a presentiment that I had suffered my last sorrow, that all was to be peace for me henceforth, except in thinking of my child, you were not persuaded; you imputed it to the shock my nerves had received, and you think so still. It is not so indeed, even

with respect to my child. I am tranquil and happy now ; I don't know why, I cannot account for it. Nothing in the circumstances is susceptible of change, and I see those circumstances as clearly as I saw them when they first existed; but I am changed. I feel as if my vision had been enlarged ; I feel as if the horizon had widened before me, and with the great space has come great calm—calm of mind —like what travellers tell us comes with the immense mountain solitudes, when all the world beneath looks little, and yet the great loneliness lifts one up nearer to heaven, and has no fear or trembling in it. I am not unquiet now, James, not even for the child. The wrong that I have done her God will right.'

James Dugdale said hastily, ‘ You have done her no conscious wrong, and all will be righted.’

‘Yes, I know; I am saying so; but not in our way, James, not as we—’ she paused a very little, almost imperceptibly—‘not as you would have it. But that it will be righted I have not the smallest doubt, not the least fear. You will remember, James, that I said to you the wrong I did my child will be righted.’

‘Remember!’ he said in keen distress. ‘What do you mean, Margaret? Have you still the same presentiment? Is this your former talk with me over again?’

‘Yes,’ she replied, ‘and no. When I talked with you before, I was troubled, sad, and afraid. Now I am neither sad, troubled, nor afraid.’

‘You are ill. There is something which you know and are hiding from us which makes you think and speak thus.’

‘No, indeed.’

There was conviction in her tone, and

he could but look at her and wait until she should speak again. She did not speak for a few moments, and then she resumed in a firm voice :

‘ I want to say to you all that is in my mind—at least as far as it can be said. I am not ill in any serious way, and I am not hiding anything which ought to be made known; and yet I do believe that I am not to live much longer in this world, and I acknowledge with a full heart that the richest portion of happiness ever given to a woman has been, is mine. When this trouble, the only one I have had in my new life, came to me, it changed me, and changed everything to me for a time; but the first effect is quite past, and the wound my pride received is healed. I don’t think about that now ; but I do think of the wonderful compensation, if I may dare to use a word which sounds like bringing God

to a reckoning for His dealings with one of His creatures, which has been made to me, and I feel that I have lived all my days. The old presentiment that I had of evil to come to me from Australia, and its fulfilment, and the suffering and struggle, all are alike gone now, quieted down, and the peace has come which I do not believe anything is ever to disturb more.'

' Margaret, Margaret!' he said, ' I cannot bear this; you must not speak thus; if you persist in doing so, there *must* be some reason for it. It is not like you to have such morbid fancies.'

' And it is not like you to misunderstand me,' she interrupted gently. ' Can you not see that I am telling you what is in my mind on what I believe will be my *last* day in my old home, because, if I am right, it will make you happy in the time to come to remember it?'

'Happy!' he repeated with impatience.

'Yes, happy! and if I am not right, and this is indeed but a morbid fancy, it will have done you no harm to hear it. You have listened to many a fancy of mine, dear old friend.'

Tears gathered in her eyes now, and two large drops fell from the dark eyelashes unheeded.

'I have, I have,' he said, 'but to what fancies! How can you speak thus, Margaret? How can you think so calmly of leaving those who love you so much, those in whose love you confess you have found so much happiness? Your husband, your child, your father!'

'I cannot tell you,' she said; 'I cannot explain it, and because I cannot I am forced to believe it, to feel that it is so. The world seems far away from me somehow, even my own small precious world. You

remember, when I spoke to you before, I told you how much I dreaded the effect of what had happened on myself, on my own feelings—how strangely the sense I have always had of being so much older than my husband, the dread of losing the power of enjoying the great happiness of my life, had seized hold of me ?'

‘I remember.’

‘Well,’ she continued, ‘all this fear has left me now—indeed, all fear of every kind, and the power of suffering, I think. When I think of the grief of those I shall have to leave, if my presentiment is realised, I don’t shrink from it as I did when the first thought of the possible future came to me. After all, it is for such a little, little time.’

Her eyes were raised upwards to the light, and a smile which the listener could not bear to see, and yet looked at—thinking, with the vain tenderness so fruitful

in pangs of every kind and degree of intensity, that at least he never, never should be unable to recall *that* look—came brightly over her face, and slowly faded.

'O, no, Margaret; life is awfully long—hopelessly long.'

'It seems so sometimes, but it has ceased to seem so to me. You must not grieve for what I am saying to you. If all is what you will think right with me, and we are here together again, you will be glad to think, to remember how I told you all that was in my heart; if it is otherwise, you will be far more than glad, James.'

In his heart there arose at that moment a desperately strong, an almost irresistible longing to tell her now, for the first time and the last, how he had loved her all his life. But he resisted the longing—he was used to self-restraint—and said not a word which could trouble her peace.

They returned to the house shortly after, and went in by the drawing-room window. At the foot of the green slope Margaret paused for a minute, and looked with a smile at the open window of her room. A white curtain fluttered about it; there was a stir as of life in the room, but there was no one there.

‘ You will take care of the passion-flower, James?’ she said. ‘ I think the blossoms will be splendid this year.’

A few hours later, and the house was deserted by all but James Dugdale. Hayes Meredith and his son had escorted Lady Davystry to her own house, and gone on from thence to dine with the Croftons.

The first letter which James Dugdale received was from Margaret. She wrote in good spirits, and gave an amusing account of her father’s delight with the Deane, and

admiration—a little qualified by the difficulty of acknowledging at least its equality with his own—of Mr. Baldwin's collection, and his frequent expressions of surprise at finding the journey by no means so disagreeable or portentous an undertaking as he had expected. She was very well, except that she had taken cold.

A day or two later Lady Davyntry heard from her brother. Margaret was not so well; the cold was obstinate and exhausting; he deeply regretted her return to Scotland; only for the risk of travelling, he should take her away immediately. The next letter was not more reassuring, and Lady Davyntry made up her mind to go to Scotland without delay. In this resolution James Dugdale, with a sick and sinking heart, confirmed her. Not a word of actual danger was said in the letters which reached Davyntry daily, but the alarm which James

felt was not slow to communicate itself to Eleanor.

‘She has been delicate for a long time,’ said Lady Davystry to James, ‘and very much more so latterly than she ever acknowledged.’

In reply to her proposal to go at once to the Deane, Eleanor had an urgent letter of thanks from her brother. Margaret was not better—strangely weak indeed. Lady Davystry was to start on the next day but one after the receipt of this letter, and James went over to Davystry on the intervening day. He had a long interview with Eleanor, and, having left her, was walking wearily towards home, when he saw Hayes Meredith and Robert rapidly advancing to meet him. He quickened his pace, and they met where the footpath wound by the clump of beech-trees, once so distasteful in Margaret’s sight. There was not a gleam

of colour in Meredith's face, and as James came up the boy shrunk back behind his father.

'What's the matter?' said James, coming to a dead stop in front of Meredith.

'My dear fellow, you will need courage. Baldwin's valet has come from the Deane.'

'Yes!' said James in a gasping voice.

'Margaret was much worse after Baldwin wrote, and the child—a girl—was born that afternoon. The child—'

'Is dead?' James tore his coat open as he asked the question, as if choking.

'No, my dear fellow'—his friend took his arm firmly within his own—'the poor child is alive, but Margaret is gone.'

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER A YEAR.

Lady Davyntry to James Dugdale.

‘THE DEANE, MARCH 17, 18—.

‘MY DEAR MR. DUGDALE,—Your last letter, imposing upon me the task of advising my brother, in the sense of the conclusions arrived at by yourself and Mr. Meredith, gave me a great deal to think about. I could not answer it fully before, and I am sure the result which I have now to state to you will not, in reality, be displeasing to you, but I cannot uphold its soundness of wisdom, in a worldly sense, even to my own judgment—though it carries with it all my sympathies; and I am confident Mr. Meredith will entirely disapprove of it.

' I was obliged to be careful in selecting an opportunity for entering upon the discussion prescribed by your letter with Fitz-william. Since his great affliction fell upon him, he is not so gentle, so easy of access, as he used to be; and though he will sometimes talk freely to me of the past, the occasions must be of his own choosing. Hence the delay. I took the best means, as I thought, of making him understand the gravity and earnestness of the matter it was necessary he should consider—I read your letter to him. The mere hearing of it distressed him very much. He said, what I also felt, that he had not thought it could be possible to make him feel the loss of Margaret more deeply, but that the statement of his present position, so clear, so true, so indisputable, has made him feel it. He listened while I read the letter again, at his request, and then left me

suddenly, saying he would tell me what to answer as soon as he could.

‘Some days elapsed, and we saw very little of him—I perceived that one of his dark moods was upon him—and yesterday he came to me, to tell me to answer your letter. He took me to the sitting-room which was Margaret’s, and where everything remains just as she left it on the last day that she came downstairs at the Deane. I suppose he felt that I could understand his decision more clearly, and be less inclined to listen to all the reasons which render it unwise, when everything around should speak of her whose undimmed memory dictated it.

‘The sum of what he said to me—with many strayings from the matter, and so much revival of the past in all its first bitterness, that I was astonished, such a faculty of grief being rarely seen in a man

—was this. He cannot bring himself to contemplate, as you and Mr. Meredith are agreed he ought, a second marriage. As nearly as possible, this was what he said :

“When we found out the wrong which had been innocently done to Gertrude, we hoped, indeed we were so persuaded, that the child we were expecting would be a boy, and the wrong be thus righted, that we never looked beyond the birth of the child, or discussed the future in any way with reference to a disappointment in that particular. The child would be the heir, and Gertrude’s future would be safe, rich, and prosperous. Such were our dreams—and when the fearful awakening came, it was some time before I understood all it meant. It was weeks before I remembered that the wrong done to the child my Margaret had loved so much, that she broke

her heart because that wrong had been done, could never be righted now. It was very long before the thought occurred to me that those to whom this dreadful truth was known would perceive that a second marriage, by giving me the chance of a male heir, and thus putting the two children on an equal footing in the eyes of the world, would afford me the only means of avoiding injustice to Eleanor."

'Here he stopped, and said he suffered equally about both children, for the youngest had also sustained the greatest loss of all. Then he continued:

"I did think of this sometimes, but with horror, and a full knowledge that though it would be a just and wise thing in one sense for the interests of my children, it would be unjust and unwise towards them and myself, and any woman whom I might induce to marry me, in another. I

daresay you will think I am talking nonsense, forgetting the influence, which, however slow, is always sure, of the lapse of time—forgetting that others have been heavily bereaved and yet have found consolation, and even come to know much happiness again—when I tell you that I never could take the slightest interest in any woman any more. Well, supposing I am wrong there—I don't think I can be; there is something in my inmost heart which tells me I am right—we are dealing now not with the future, but with the present. James is right in pointing out that I must make up my mind to some course, and I am glad Meredith is still interested in me and in the children's future. Time may alter my state of mind, but if it does, no arrangements made now will be irrevocable.

“But, as my life is uncertain, I am not

justified in allowing any more time to go by, without providing, as well as I can, for the contingencies which may arise. Tell James I am deeply impressed with the truth of this, and the strong necessity of acting on all he and Meredith have set before me, though I cannot act upon it in the way in which they prescribe. For the present—and you will not need to be assured that I am not regardless of what Margaret would wish—I must only make all the reparation which money can make to Eleanor."

‘Then Fitzwilliam entered into a full explanation of the position of the estate, and gave me the enclosed memorandum, which he wishes you and Mr. Meredith to see, and showed me how the ready money he can leave to Eleanor, and the income, apart from the entailed estate, which he can settle on her, in reality amount to

within two thousand a year of the income which must come to Gertrude as heir of entail. To this purpose he intends to devote all this money, his great object being to render the position of his children as nearly equal as possible, and so reduce the unintentional injustice done to Eleanor, and the wrong, now past atonement, inflicted on Gertrude, to such small dimensions as may relieve him from any suffering on the subject.

‘ He has requested that no portion of Mr. Carteret’s property should be left to either of the children. They will be rich enough, and he considers, very justly, that Haldane’s children will have a superior claim on Mr. Carteret, who was feverishly anxious, Fitzwilliam tells me, to have all his affairs settled; when he spoke to him, he did not like this idea at all, he is so much attached to little Gertrude; but when

my brother told him he knew it would have been Margaret's wish that her brother should have all it was in their father's power to give, he was satisfied, and promised that it should be so.

'In telling you this, I daresay I am repeating what is already known to you ; but I give it its place in the conversation between us, as bearing upon the point that the only way in which the past can now be repaired, is by securing to the children as much equality in money matters as possible.

'As a branch of this subject, I may tell you that the future disposition of my property has been discussed between us. In Davystry I have, as I daresay you know, only a life-interest, and the money of which I have to dispose comes to me from my father. It is six hundred a year, and I shall at once make my will in favour of

Eleanor. Thus the inequality in the fortunes of the girls will be decreased, and Fitzwilliam is much less likely than ever to live up to his income. The girls will both be very rich heiresses, no doubt, and I do not think any of us who are in the secret need feel that the advantage to Gerty of appearing as the heiress of the Deane is very material.

' Her father feels very deeply the condition of the entail which prescribed that she must bear her own name, her husband being obliged to assume it. There is a sting in that which you will thoroughly comprehend. He asked me if I thought that remembrance had contributed to the pain which Margaret had suffered about this calamity, but I could assure him conscientiously that I did not think it had ever occurred to her. The child was so mere an infant, and the strong hope 'and expect-

ation, disappointed by Eleanor's birth, possessed them so completely, that money matters, in connection with the future, were never discussed between them. He confirmed me in this. They never were ; and now it is a keen source of regret to him, because, he says, he should be fortified by the knowledge of how she would have desired he should act, under the present circumstances.

' Poor fellow ! I listened to him, seriously of course ; but, sad as it was, I could hardly keep from smiling at the way in which he confounds the present with the past, forgetting that he had no fear, no misgivings, no presentiment, and therefore that no reason existed for such a discussion. All this will appear impracticable to Mr. Meredith, but he will have patience with my brother ; he saw enough of what their life together was, to understand, in some de-

gree, the immeasurable loss. My ignorance of all that had occurred, at the time of Margaret's death, is, perhaps, regretable on this score, that I might have gotten at more of her mind than, for his sake, she would have betrayed to him ; but it is too late now to repair that ignorance, and we must only do the best we can in the children's interests.

' Keeping in view the change time may produce—that my brother is still a young man, and that a second marriage may not always be so repugnant to him as it is at present—I think we may rest satisfied in having induced him to contemplate, and, no doubt, as soon as possible to make, a proper disposition of his property. As for the children, they are as happy as little unconscious creatures like them can be, and I do not think their father's making a second marriage would be an undivided

blessing for them. Where is there a second Margaret to be found?

‘ Fitzwilliam spoke to me very freely on this point. He could not pretend to any woman that he loved her ; and as, in that case, his second wife must necessarily marry him for mercenary motives, could he regard any woman who would do so as a fitting representative of their mother to his children—could he make her even tolerably happy, thus entering upon a life in which there could be no mutual respect ? Such arguments are all-powerful with a woman, especially with me ; for I know how pure, how disinterested, our lost Margaret’s feelings and motives in her marriage were, and remember only too well seeing how they were realised—the doubt and dread she expressed when she first recognised the prospect for the future which lay before her. How wonderful and dread-

ful it seems to speak of her thus in the past, to refer to that which seemed so completely all in all to us then, and is now gone for ever !

‘ My brother is content with the care the children have from me, and, far more effectually, from Rose. Time teaches me her value more and more forcibly, and I am more and more thankful that, in the blackest and worst time of our distress, you suggested her being sent for. How strange and fortunate that Margaret had given you a clue to what her wishes would have been ! Neither Fitzwilliam nor I would have thought of her ; indeed, I had entirely forgotten the “ Irish - Australian importation of Margaret’s,” as I once heard poor Mrs. Carteret speak of her. She is a comfort to us all past describing.

‘ I do not know whether Fitzwilliam has told you that Terence Doran, Rose’s

husband, is coming to him in a month as factor. He is a very clever young man, we understand, and, though well placed in Ireland, willing to come here, for his wife's sake, to enable her to remain with the children. I have no intention of leaving the Deane for the present. Fitzwilliam seems restless ; he does not say so, but I fancy he wishes to go abroad again. I should not be surprised if he started off soon on some prolonged tour.

' You ask me about the children. Before I reply to your questions, let me tell you how sorry we all are that there is no chance of our seeing you here. We understand, of course, that the state of your own health, and the duty you feel imposed upon you with regard to poor Mr. Carteret, to whom it would be naturally most distasteful to come here, furnish indisputable reasons for your absence, but we do not the less

regret it. I infer from the news that Mr. Meredith means to leave England next month, that he has satisfactorily brought all his business to a conclusion. His return will be a great boon to his family. An absence which, by the time he reaches Melbourne, will have been prolonged to nearly two years, is a terrible slice out of this short mortal life. I suppose all the arrangements made for his son have succeeded to his satisfaction, and that you, with your inviolable kindness, have undertaken the supervision of the boy.

‘And now, about the children. Gertrude is a fine child, very like Margaret in face, and, so far as one can judge of so young a child, of a nice disposition, rather grave and sensitive. Her father idolises her; he is never weary of the little girl’s company, and I can see that he is always tracing the likeness to the face hidden from

him for a while. Little Eleanor is delicate and peevish; indeed, if it be not foolish to say so of an infant, I should say she is of a passionate nature; she is not so pretty as Gertrude, but has large brown eyes, quite unlike either her sister or her poor mother. She is Rose Doran's favourite, and I can trace sometimes, in her candid Irish face, some surprise and displeasure when she notices my brother's intense affection for the elder girl. She has no knowledge of anything which makes the child an object of compassionate love to the father.'

'MARCH 18.

'When I had written so far, I was interrupted by Fitzwilliam. He brought me a letter which he has written to Mr. Janvrin, of Lincoln's Inn, his solicitor, and which contains instructions for the drawing up of a will according to the plan I have

mentioned. He wishes me to recapitulate to you what would be the children's positions in the event of his death, unmarried, and not having revoked this will.

' Gertrude would succeed to all the entailed property, chargeable, as in Fitzwilliam's case, with a provision for her younger children.

' Eleanor would have all the savings from the general income up to the time of her father's death, and all such property as is not included in the entail.

' Haldane Carteret and I are named as the guardians and trustees, and my brother signifies his wish that his children should reside alternately with either Mrs. Carteret or me, according to the general convenience.

' Will you kindly communicate this to Mr. Meredith, together with my personal acknowledgment of the kind interest he has

taken in us all during the sorrowful period of his stay in England?

‘ Always, my dear Mr. Dugdale, most faithfully yours,

‘ ELEANOR DAVYNTRY.’

James Dugdale to Lady Davyntry.

‘ CHAYLEIGH, MARCH 20.

‘ MY DEAR LADY DAVYNTRY,—I have to thank you for your kind and explanatory letter. I never expected Baldwin to take the view of the matter on which I wrote to you which Meredith takes. Meredith is so much more of a man of the world than I am, has so much longer a head, and so much sounder judgment, that I could not hesitate to transmit to you and Baldwin his views, in which the world, could it know what we are so unfortunate as to

know, would no doubt recognise reason and force. Well, we too recognise them, but that is all.

' All the dispositions which you tell me Baldwin has made are admirable under the circumstances, and considering his determination, which I do not think is likely to yield to the influence of time, which cannot restore her who was lost, and will, I am convinced, but increase his appreciation of the extent and severity of that loss. Gertrude gains only in name and appearance, and does her sister no real injury. I have often thought how terrible Baldwin's position would have been had not Eleanor lived. Then he must either have married again, or done an injury to the heir of entail by permitting Gertrude to succeed. Meredith was asking me about the succession, but I could not tell him. I fancy I heard, but I don't remember where, when,

or how, that the next heir is a distant relative, with whom Baldwin is not acquainted.

‘ Mr. Carteret had told me, before I received your letter, Baldwin’s wishes about his will, and that he intended to comply with them. The only legacy Gertrude will inherit from her grandfather is the unfinished portrait which you brought from Naples. He never mentioned it, or seemed to notice that I had had it unpacked and placed in the study, until the day on which he mentioned Baldwin’s request, and then he looked at it, quite a fond, quiet smile. The calm, the impassability of old age is coming over him, fortunately for him.

‘ But while I perfectly understand the force and approve the object of the representation which Baldwin has made to Mr. Carteret, and while I heartily approve the reason and the generosity of the disposition

you intend making of such portion of your property as is within your power, I do not think I am bound by similar restrictions. Partly because the little I possess is so small, so utterly trivial and unimportant, in comparison with the handsome fortune which the measures Baldwin is taking will secure, with your assistance, to Eleanor ; and partly because I feel towards the elder child in a peculiar way, almost inexplicable to myself—I intend to bequeath to Gertrude the small sum I possess the power of bequeathing.

‘ She shall have it when I am gone, and it shall be left at her free and uncontrolled disposition ; it will add a little yearly sum to her pleasures, or, if she be as like her mother in her nature as in her face, to her charities. It will be a great pleasure to me to know that Gertrude, whose splendid inheritance will come to her by a real though guiltless error, will at least have

that small heritage in her own real undisputable right—not as the heiress of anything or any one, only as Margaret's child.

'I am so glad to know what you tell me concerning Rose Doran. She was always a good, genuine creature, and it is almost as rare as it is pleasant to anticipate excellence and not to be disappointed. Baldwin should be careful, however, of annoying her by displaying too marked a preference for Gerty. Rose is a very shrewd person, and in her impulsive Irish mind the process, which should make her suspicious of a reason for this preference, and jealous for the child whose life cost that of her mother, would not be a difficult one.

'Meredith's plans are unchanged. He has every reason to be satisfied with the arrangements made for Robert. I have no doubt the boy will do well. He wants

neither ability nor application ; I wish he had as much heart and as much frankness. Davyntry is looking very well, lonely, of course, but well taken care of; I ramble about there almost every day. Haldane and his wife are expected next week at the Croftons.

‘ Yours, dear Lady Davyntry, always truly,

‘ JAMES DUGDALE.’

*Hayes Meredith to Fitzwilliam Meriton
Baldwin.*

‘ CHAYLEIGH, APRIL 2.

‘ MY DEAR BALDWIN,—I am off in a short time now, and this is to say good-bye —most likely for ever. At my time of life I am not likely to get back to England again, unless, indeed, I should make a fortune by some very unlikely hazard, of which not the faintest indication appears at present.

' I am very much obliged to you for letting me know all the arrangements you have made. I am sure you know my feeling in the matter was interest, not curiosity, and though not only the safest, surest, speediest, but also the most natural and agreeable way of putting an end to your difficulties appeared to me to be a second marriage, I am not going to blame you because you don't think so. I know the difficulties of the position, but, after all, you inflict a mere technical wrong on one sister, while you make up for it by endowing her with a much larger fortune than she would have had, had her real position been what her apparent one is—that of a younger child.

' From what you say of the amount of the savings which you expect to leave to Eleanor, I should think she would be little less rich than Gertrude, and without the burden of a large landed estate and estab-

lishment to keep up—also enjoying the immense advantage of being able to dispose of her property as she chooses, an advantage which Gertrude will not enjoy, and which, with my colonial ideas, I am disposed to estimate very highly indeed.

‘I have so many kindnesses and attentions to thank you for, that I must put all my acknowledgments into this one, and beg you to believe that I feel them deeply. The most welcome of all the acts of friendship I have received from you is your promise not to lose sight of Robert. He will get on well, I think. If he does not, his heart will be more in fault than his head, in my belief.

‘As to O——, I hardly know what to think of your proposal. I doubt its being altogether safe to open communications voluntarily with a man of his sort. He is so very likely, after his kind, to impute some bad, or at least suspicious motive to

an act of charity which I should not be disposed to give him credit for understanding or believing in. The least danger we should have to fear would be his establishing himself as a regular pensioner in consideration of your aid extended to him in so inexplicable a fashion.

'But, beyond this, there is more to apprehend. I think I told you he knew nothing of M—, not even her former name, nor her destination in England. If he receives a sum of money from you, he will naturally make inquiries about you, and there will be no means of keeping the required information from him. Once supply him with a clue to any connection between you and his worthy comrade deceased, and O— must be very unlike the man I believe him to be, and must have profited very insufficiently by such companionship, if he does not see his way to a profitable secret, and the chance of *chantage*,

in a very short time. This is the risk I foresee, and which I should not like to run.

‘At the same time, I understand the feeling which has dictated the proposition you make to me, and I can quite believe, remembering her noble nature so well as I do remember it, that M—— would, as you suppose, have been glad to rescue from want the man to whom H—— owed, after all, relief in his last days, if to him she also owed the knowledge of her sorrow. I propose therefore (subject to your approval), when I arrive at Melbourne, to inquire, with judicious caution, into what has become of O——, and if I find him living and in distress, to assist him to a limited extent, provided he is not quite so incorrigible a scoundrel as that assisting him would be enabling him to prey on society on a larger and more successful scale.

‘I would suggest, however, that under no circumstances should he be told that the

money comes from you. I shall be credited, if I find him a proper object or anything short of an entirely unjustifiable object for your bounty, with a charitable action, which it certainly never would have come into my head to perform; but I am quite willing, if it gives you any pleasure or consolation, to carry the burden of undeserved praise and such gratitude as is to be expected from O——, not a very oppressive quantity, I fancy.

‘I am glad to hear good news of you all from Dugdale. And now, my dear Baldwin, nothing remains for me to say, except that which cannot be written. Farewell. We shall hear how the world wags for each of us through Dugdale.

‘Yours faithfully,

‘HAYES MEREDITH.’

Mrs. Haldane Carteret to Miss Crofton.

‘CHAYLEIGH, APRIL 18.

‘MY DEAR MINNIE,—I promised to write to you as soon as I arrived here, but I have been so busy, finding myself in a manner at home, and *tant soit peu* mistress of the house, that I could not manage it. No doubt you find it desperately dull at school, but then you are coming out after a while, and the vacation is not far off—and I can assure you I am almost as dull here as you are. I have my own way in everything, to be sure; but then that is not of much use, unless one has something in view which it is worth while to be persistent about. And really the old gentleman, though he is a dear nice old thing and sweet-tempered to a degree, is very tiresome.

‘You know, of course, from mamma’s letter, that Haldane is not coming for a week or two. He has to remain in London

to meet Mr. Baldwin on some *very important* business. I believe it is simply that Haldane is to be made trustee and guardian to our little nieces, if their father dies, and that cannot be anything very particular; but then, you know, there never were such children. (I am sure I shall not wish mine to be made such a fuss with, not that it is in the least likely.) Everything that concerns them must be fussed and bothered about in the most intolerable way.

' A great deal of this is Lady Daventry's fault; I must say, though she and I are the greatest friends—as such near relations ought to be—she does worry me sometimes. However, she is not here to worry me now; she is at the Deane, and writes to Mr. Carteret almost every day, of course about nothing but the children. If they are made so much of now when they are infants, what will it be when they are grown up enough to understand, and

be utterly spoiled by it, as of course they must be? It would not be easy to imagine worse training for the heiresses; however, you don't want me to moralise about them, but to tell you some news. And so I would, my dear Minnie, if I had any to tell, but I have not.

' Mr. Dugdale is, if possible, less amusing than ever: but I see very little of him. He has installed himself in poor Margaret's room—fortunately for me it is not the best room, as I suspect I should have had some difficulty in making him decamp, for he is excessively pertinacious in a quiet way, and as for Mr. Carteret interfering, one might as well expect one of his pinned butterflies to stand up for one's rights; so there he generally is, except at meal-times, or when he is wandering about at Davyntry. The fact is, the house, and every one in it, is be-Baldwinised to an intolerable extent.

' Of course I was dreadfully sorry for

poor dear Margaret. I must have been, considering she was my sister-in-law, if even she had not been my greatest friend ; but there is reason in everything, and I should not be doing my duty to Haldane if I went on fretting for ever ; there's nothing men dislike so much in women as moping, or an over-exhibition of feeling. I assure you if she had died only last week —and after all, the melancholy event took place at the Deane, you know, and not here at all—the house could not be more mopey.

‘I don’t think it is quite fair to me, considering the state of my health, and that my spirits naturally require a little rousing ; and really sometimes, when I can get nothing out of Mr. Carteret but “Yes, my dear,” or “No, my dear,” and when I know he is thinking rather of Margaret or of the collection—such a lot of trash as it is, and it takes up such a quantity of room—I am quite provoked. And as for Mr.

Dugdale, it is worse; for though he is very polite, I declare I don't think he ever really sees me, and I am sure, if he was asked suddenly, on oath, he could not tell whether my hair is red, black, or gray. And *it is* a nuisance when there are only two men in the house with one that they should be men of that sort.

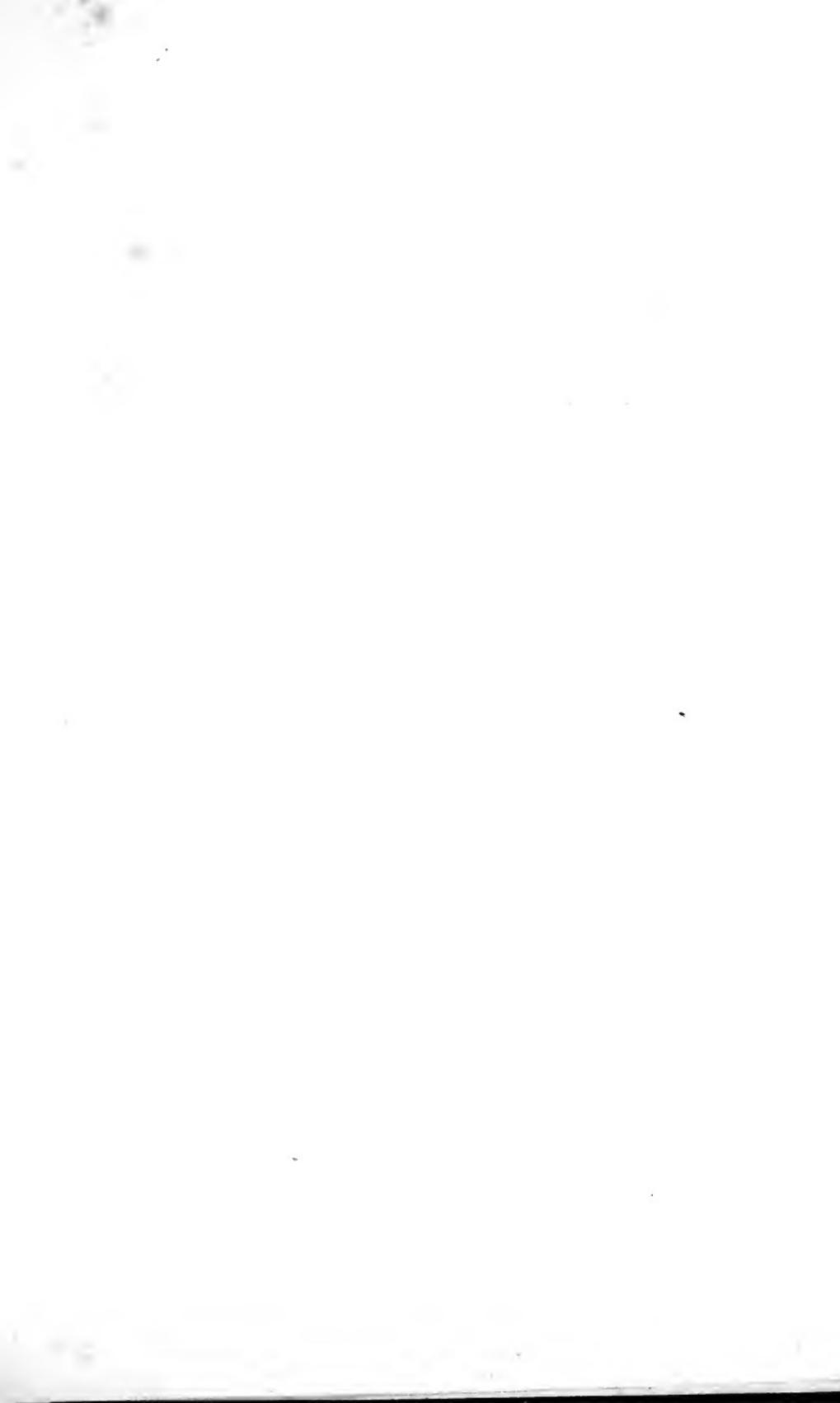
'I don't suppose it will be much better when Haldane comes, for I fancy there is not the faintest chance of any company; nothing but Carteret and Crofton, Crofton and Carteret,—after a whole year, too, it is a little too bad. I have slipped out of mourning, though, that's a comfort. You know I never looked well in black, and it is not *the dress* after all, is it? Haldane thought I might go on with grays and lilacs, but mourning, however slight, is not considered lucky, and though I am not at all superstitious myself, it would never do to offend other people's prejudices, would it?

‘There is really nothing to look forward to until you come home, except, perhaps, a visit from Robert Meredith ; and he is only a boy ; but he is very clever and amusing, and greatly inclined to make a fool of himself about me. Of course it would not do to encourage him if he were older ; but it does me no harm, and keeps him out of mischief. His father has sailed for Melbourne. I really have no more to say, as of course you get all the home news from mamma.—Your affectionate sister,

‘LUCY CARTERET.

‘P.S. I have just heard from Haldane. It is almost settled that he is to leave the army. Mr. Baldwin is going in a few days to the East, and intends to be away for three years at the least.’

END OF VOL. II.







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